Nikita Pokrovsky

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The book provides an integral conception of the world outlook and life of Henry David Thoreau, an original American 19th century thinker, Romantic philosopher and writer, whose work made a significant impact on the development of American culture, and on the world view of many major thinkers in other countries.

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CONTENTS

Introduction 7
Chapter I. The Stages of Life: Books, Personalities, Events 27
Chapter II. The Theoretical Sources of the System of Thoreau's Views 56
Chapter III. The Symbolist Worldview 82
1. Between Image and Concept 82
2. The Romantic Picture of the World . . 92
3. The Mythological Law of "Renewal" . 108
Chapter IV. Man on the Path to Nature 116
1. The Foundations of Romantic Naturalism 117
2. Man-Nature-The Absolute: The Correspondence Principle 127
3. The Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Experiencing of the Landscape 138
Chapter V. The View of Society 156
1. Property, Division of Labour, Culture, Business: A Critical Analysis 156
2. Debunking the State 171
3. A Positive Alternative: Solitude and Non-Resistance 175
4. Henry Thoreau and John Brown: From Non-Resistance to Resistance 193
Chapter VI. American Transcendentalism and Its Echoes Today 197
1. Debate on Romanticism and Contemporary Counterculture 198

2. Henry Thoreau's Naturalism and Its Perception by Present-Day Romantics . . 203
3. Nature and the Social Alternative 209
Afterword. Thoreau in a Changing World 218
Bibliography 231
Name Index 240

Today I, feeling weak, read Thoreau, and was spiritually uplifted.

Leo Tolstoy

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

Henry David Thoreau

Did all great geographical discoveries rouse the feelings of joy and delight in the discoverers? There is little in the scant documents that have reached us to shed light on this. And yet—

Leif Erikson, the Viking chief who, at some time round the year 1000, led his band south, starting from Greenland he knew so well, discovered an endless shore all overgrown with sweet wild grapes. That was America. But, as if frightened by their own discovery, the Norsemen hurriedly left the new lands, and an account of this journey became known to the Europeans only several centuries later.

Things were not much different with Christopher Columbus. When the distant shore of the Western continent rose out of the sea during his second voyage to America, the "great admiral of the ocean" ordered the notary to question the personnel of all the three caravels, and to "notify ... the crews and all the other persons on board that they should come out with any doubts as to whether or not that land was the beginning of India" (25,

11).* If crew members had any doubts on that score, they would not be likely to express them, for they were liable to be fined 10,000 maravedis, receive a hundred lashes, and—a most barbarous punishment—have their disobedient tongue cut off. Columbus wanted India at any cost, not the New World no one knew anything about.

That was how America was discovered a second time—on the sly.

But that was by no means the end of the epic of its discovery, now sporadic and turbulent, now slow and implacable. True, the discoveries were different each time—commercial, colonial, piratical. At first, the new lands seemed fantastically alluring to all those who found it hard to breathe, for one reason or another, in the close confines of the decrepit Old World. There also came a time for a spiritual discovery of America.

On November 21, 1620, a small sailing boat poetically named *Mayflower*, quite the worse for wear after the rough autumn storms of the Northern Atlantic and terribly overloaded, dropped anchor in a bay near Cape Cod. It would be hard to imagine a less fortunate spot for disembarking: shallows everywhere, reefs betrayed here and there by eddies and breakers, and a low bare coastline with dunes open to all the winds.

But disembark they did—in contravention of sound maritime practice, perhaps, but in

* The figures in parentheses refer to the publications consulted or cited and listed at the back; the second figure indicates the page; figures referring to volumes are italicised.

keeping with the logic of desperation of those who were brought to the fatal line by destiny. All the countless misfortunes they had overcome were nothing compared to the yet unknown ones, which the newcomers would have to go through. It was the desire to gain spiritual freedom rather than aspirations of wealth or adventure that had brought them to America. These adherents of an extreme radical trend in English Protestantism had gone through untold hardships: the perfidious persecution of King James I and of the rulers of free Holland, the hatred of the Anglican Church and of Catholic Rome, the leaders' renunciation of their credo, the betrayal of co-religionists, imprisonment in the Tower, public executions, deprivation of civil rights and earthly goods, and a great deal else.

The winds of all Europe filled the sails of the *Mayflower*, but they were not the favourable winds of wanderlust—rather the stormy squalls of banishment.

In the teeth of all the hardships, the Pilgrim Fathers sought inspiration in the ideal of the "city on high", new Chanaan, which it was their mission to build in the new Promised Land, where humility, piety, brotherly love, as well as strict law and order, would prevail. As for law and order, they did indeed soon prevail in the relatively closed congregations of the first settlers. Their triumph, though, made many settlers recall with something like regret the way of things in the Old World. Humiliated and insulted in the past, the Pilgrim Fathers went at building a "new Chanaan" with great gusto, and ideological

coercion, banishment of dissenters, rigid social regulation stipulating inequality on earth of those equal before God, were part and parcel of this new way of life.

Force established order but gave no peace of mind. The colonists' free spirit rebelled, their pride was unvanquished. The master plan for building a "new Chanaan" was continually refuted by life itself—but the Pilgrim Fathers saw all this merely as a result of the scheming of Satan in human shape. William Bradford, one of the principal leaders of the settlers who came over on the *Mayflower*, a governor of New Plymouth over many years, lamented at the end of his days that too many spiritually weak and corrupt people had flooded the country. He was worried that the bigger part of the settlers might have become worse than before.

Spiritual discovery of America did take place, but it was merely a partial discovery, one that did not bear all the fruit expected of it. There was some talk even that it would have been better if there had been no discovery at all.

Two hundred years after the fatal arrival of the *Mayflower*, Henry Thoreau was slowly wandering over Cape Cod dunes overgrown with heather. Despite his French-sounding name (and some of his ancestors *were* French, though there were also Scotsmen among them, too), he regarded himself as a hundred per cent American—with good reason. He loved his native land with a love that was soberly sensitive to everything that was good and bad in the life around him, the good never eclipsing in his mind the bad, nor vice versa.

As he viewed from the shifting top of a dune the almost lifeless area which—who knows!—might have been the historical spot where the colonists had disembarked, Thoreau felt no awe or excitement that might have been expected of a Romantic writer. The surf gnawed callously at the pliant sand of the beach, the vista of the ocean, merging with the pallied sky, closed in all visible space; nature had not felt it proper to mark the memorable spot with some phenomenon or cataclysm. Thoreau's thought flowed along the channel of historical associations. The *Mayflower* ... Columbus ... the Vikings.... The latter particularly intrigued Thoreau. He went down on one knee and, producing from his bag a *trente-deux* notebook—a constant companion of all the geographers, naturalists and writers of those days—noted down something that had just come into his head: if most of us believe that America, once discovered, was then forgotten, why not discover it yet again?

The spiritual heritage of great Americans who are the glory of world culture—and Henry Thoreau and his older friend and source of inspiration, Ralph Waldo Emerson, are undoubtedly among them—is characterised by one constant: their love for their native land and hopes for its future were linked with their passionate rejection of what was then associated with the foundations of the Philistine way of life. Moreover, the "loss" of America—the loss of the intrinsic ties with the ways and forms of the surrounding social life—preceded the complex, dramat-

ic and often contradictory process of "regaining" America.

America regained was not the same for all. Some regained it in the vortex of democratic movements and struggle for political justice, others, in the quiet of the pristine forests of Vermont and Massachusetts, still others, on the roads and tracks of the Mid-West among those who had inherited the spirit of the first settlers. But they were all united by their faith in their country's future, by their belief that its true wealth rests in the common man carrying on his shoulders the heavy load of national history.

When Henry Thoreau is mentioned among professional philosophers, the questions are often asked: "And was he really a philosopher? What was so remarkable about him?" Indeed, Thoreau's ideas are not treated in general courses of 19th-century philosophy, nor are they covered, as a rule, in anthologies and monographic studies. There were good reasons for this disappearance of Thoreau from the purview of philosophers of history; in this sense, it was quite natural. However, the development of complex ideological processes in Western Europe and the USA, including the emergence and ideological formation in the 1960s of counterculture, a sharp increase of the role of ecological consciousness, and neo-Romantic critique of the social consequences of the scientific and technological revolution in the West by Left-wing radicals, have made it necessary to revise the traditional notions about the classics of philosophy or, to be more precise, to add new names to their number.

Today, it seems, there have arisen the need for and the real possibility of a critical inquiry into and reappraisal of the views of Henry Thoreau, the American Romantic philosopher, writer and naturalist of the first half of the 19th century whose ideological quest anticipated the ethical-philosophical attitudes among certain US intellectuals today.

As often happens to truly original minds, Thoreau was little known among his compatriots. He spent almost all his life in the small town of Concord, Massachusetts, near Boston. Among his neighbours Thoreau enjoyed the doubtful reputation of a crank unwilling to join in the chase after the generally accepted earthly comforts. Rumour, by no means innocuous in an out-of-the-way small town, condemned the philosopher for his idleness, worthless undertakings, and the doubtful company he kept. Fortunately, Concord, so tiny in today's terms, was not always a paragon of bourgeoisdom. In the 1830s, it became the centre of the New England Renaissance—a short-lived but extremely intense flowering of the arts, literature, and religious reform, all of which had reverberations on a national scale. The philosophical basis of the New England Renaissance was largely determined by the ideas of Romanticism, interpreted in the USA in Transcendentalist naturalist terms. The trend of thought called American, or New England, Transcendentalism, was headed by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Until the mid-20th century, all Transcendentalists were eclipsed, as it were, by the all-American and even European fame of Emerson, whose work harmoniously combined,

in the general view, the brilliance of stylistic gifts and age-long European intellectual traditions with a fine feeling for the novelty of the American national culture. Later, however, a significant re-appraisal of historico-philosophical values took place, and Henry Thoreau came to be regarded as the most profound philosopher among the New England Transcendentalists. As if to refute Mark Twain's definition of a classic as someone whom everybody studies but nobody reads. Thoreau ranked first among 19th-century American classics in terms of editions in his native country and translations into foreign languages in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, the thinker's personality became a national phenomenon in the USA today. Even those Americans who have no claims at all to any in-depth knowledge of his philosophy have their own image of Thoreau created by popular publications, the mass media, and public opinion in general. It is a different matter whether this image accords with the historical truth. Some see Thoreau as a symbol of what they refer to as the "nation's conscience". Others attack him for his individualism, anarchism and escape from the social reality—ideas that are said to express the gist of his worldview. Thoreau's ideas, as contradictory as his personality, sometimes engender diametrically opposed judgements. I believe, however, that there is undoubtedly more truth in the views of those who recognize the progressive significance of Thoreau's heritage than in a flat rejection of it.

Generally speaking, no philosopher's views,

however far back in time he may have lived, can be regarded as irrelevant to modern times. Any achievement of philosophical thought that was innovative in its own time can be projected onto our epoch. This is borne out yet again by the fate of Thoreau's theoretical and artistic heritage.

More than a hundred years after the philosopher's death his ideas gained wide currency, especially among those to whom they were originally addressed by Thoreau himself—among people who are not professional philosophers, the common people, those who reject academic science for its self-imposed caste isolation and wish to see philosophy as a code of principles for moral conduct in everyday life. The interest in Thoreau has thus proved to be a phenomenon of popular rather than purely scientific culture. No wonder that of the several thousand publications on Thoreau that have appeared since 1941, most are newspaper articles, resolutions of mass rallies, manifestos of various organisations, reports of private individuals trying to follow Thoreau's recommendations, which heavily outnumber articles in academic journals and monographs. Thoreau's philosophical and literary heritage will most likely long remain an interesting object of study, being a source of insights not only in the spiritual past of the USA but also in its present.

* * *

A philosopher's life is a most important part of any historico-philosophical study. It

helps recreate the scholar's image and at the same time throw light on the formation of his worldview in the context of interaction of various social factors. However, in studying the classics of world philosophy, we mostly see the life story of their authors as an interesting but by no means indispensable supplement. But is analysis of a philosophical system divorced from the life of its creator always justifiable? Philosophy is inalienably linked with a definite range of problems that are solved, in one way or another, by the philosopher's life itself. In this light, of undoubted interest is the extent to which the philosopher himself saw his way of life as a continuation and actual confirmation of the ideas he propounded, the extent to which the boundary between theoretical and practical activity was obliterated in his worldview, the degree to which he immersed philosophy in the world of real human problems permeating the very fabric of doctrine.

All kinds of classifications of schools and trends in philosophy have been worked out during its age-long history. This fact indicates the workings of one of the deeper laws of the progress of philosophy, which recurs again and again to its sources in order to evaluate its past from the positions of the present.

The schools and trends that have been identified in the history of philosophy are extremely varied. The decisive principle of classification has always been the distinction between two opposing philosophical positions—"the line of Plato and the line of Democritus", and analysis of the dialectical or

metaphysical features inherent in the philosophical worldview of a given thinker.

Along with this general classificatory principle, more partial ones have been employed in the history of philosophy; their significance is limited either by a concrete historical period or a relatively narrow range of thinkers falling under the proposed classificatory headings. One of these partial principles was the division of the history of philosophical thought into the "academic" and "non-academic" traditions; these traditions could be identified already in antiquity, although they were not absolutely stable, sometimes manifesting themselves merely in individual aspects of a given philosopher's worldview. The "non-academic" trend characteristically interpreted the subject-matter of philosophy as the search for the meaning of life.

From the very outset—i.e., beginning with Socrates, in Europe—the "non-academic" philosophical tradition rejected the exclusive nature of philosophical knowledge and the caste mentality of the narrow circle of the high priests of wisdom. Such rejection stemmed from a definite view of the subject-matter of philosophy; its purpose was not the search for a knowledge of the world in a narrow sense but a recreation of wisdom based not only, and not so much, on a rational vision of the world as on experiencing life. In the words of Soviet philosopher Valentin Asmus, Socrates viewed philosophy as "the study of how man must live rather than as a speculative contemplation of nature" (8, 84). Socrates compared the skill of living with art. Characteristic of the "non-academic" philo-

sophical tradition is a vague and fluctuating boundary between philosophy and art. Depending on one's viewpoint, it may be referred to either as artistic philosophy or as philosophical art. The Socratic revolution in philosophy is regarded by the Soviet philosopher Aleksei Losev as the turning-point in the entire history of the Greek spirit. "That man [Socrates] wanted to understand and evaluate life. That was apparently his fatal mission, the purpose without which neither subsequent life in antiquity nor the centuries of later culture were conceivable" (66, 51). Socrates saw life itself as a problem at the core of which was man—thinking, cognizing, experiencing emotions and suffering. Philosophy became the art of comprehending the world, wisdom applied to everyday experience. This was expressed, subtly and precisely by Peter Abelard. He said that the names "wisdom" and "philosophy" had been used not so much to denote accumulated knowledge as to designate the holiness of life, as we knew from the very origin of the word "philosophy" and from the testimony of the holy fathers. That was why, Abelard went on to say, in Book VIII of his *City of God* Saint Augustine wrote this with reference to philosophical schools: "The Italic school was founded by Pythagoras of Samos who, they say, passed down to us the name 'philosophy' he had chosen himself. Before Pythagoras wisemen were people who probably differed from the others by their commendable life. Pythagoras, however, when asked who he believed he was himself, answered: 'Philosopher', i.e., a man seeking wisdom or its friend because it was too presumptious

to call himself a wiseman." The words "who probably differed from the others by their commendable life" clearly showed that the heathen wisemen, i.e., philosophers, were called so for their commendable life, rather than their outstanding knowledge. This was how Abelard concluded his thoughts about wisdom and philosophy (see 3, 29).

"Non-academic" philosophers humanised the world of nature, painting it in human colours. In their works, the search for a strictly scientific worldview gave way to attempts to establish a unitary attitude to the world combining theoretical reasoning, religion, and mode of life; on this approach, philosophy became wisdom applied to everyday experience.

In 19th-century America, the "non-academic" tradition was most fully expressed in the life and philosophical ideas of Henry Thoreau. He often voiced his negative attitude to academic philosophy, whose principal vice was, in his view, its uselessness. Going to an extreme, in a way, Thoreau believed that the entire traditional philosophy was a by-product of the development of civilisation rather than the fruit of true spiritual culture. As a purely academic discipline, philosophy had a meaning, in Thoreau's opinion, only to those who practiced it professionally. That professorial science wallowing in endless discussion of theoretical nuances explained nothing to men, it offered them no guidance in practical life. Philosophical knowledge had to be deprived of its self-sufficiency and brought closer to the solution of human problems. "There are nowadays professors of philosophy," wrote Thoreau,

"but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life not only theoretically, but practically. The success of great scholars and thinkers is commonly a courtier-like success, not kingly, not manly... The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life" (100, 12-13). This is, in brief outline, Thoreau's programme; it is close to the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. Apart from a nihilist assessment of academic philosophy, the passage quoted here contains certain positive elements which are indicative of Thoreau's views on the essence and character of philosophy in general. Thoreau relies on two concepts—those of wisdom and mode of life. Following the classical tradition, he interprets the term "philosophy" as "love for wisdom". In his view, the purpose of philosophy is to teach man to live "a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust". But the ability to live such a life is the final result of a moral evolution. It must be preceded by a long process of acquiring a philosophical self-consciousness, in which perfect understanding of the meaning of the world (wisdom) is combined with application of that understanding to practical being (mode of life).

Wisdom makes man's spiritual life philosophically meaningful. But this wisdom, as Thoreau saw it, was alien both to philosophising

divorced from life and to down-to-earth moralising. "The title *wise* is, for the most part, falsely applied," wrote Thoreau. "How can one be a wise man, if he does not know any better how to live than other man?—if he is only more cunning and intellectually subtle? Does Wisdom work in a tread-mill? or does she teach how to succeed *by her example*? Is there any such thing as wisdom not applied to life? Is she merely the miller who grinds the finest logic? It is pertinent to ask if Plato got his *living* in a better way or more successfully than his contemporaries,—or did he succumb to the difficulties of life like other men? Did he seem to prevail over some of them merely by indifference, or by assuming grand airs?" (99, *4*, 462-463). Thus even Plato's wisdom was questioned by Thoreau.

Thoreau's desire to bring philosophy closer to problems that are of vital importance to man was also based on the conviction that the truths of science have no practical significance: "Mathematical truths stand aloof from the warm life of man—the mere cold and unfleshed skeletons of truth" (75, 182). Only those truths which helped to solve certain problems not only theoretically but also practically were regarded as real truths by the philosopher.

What is the meaning of the concept of practice, so often used by Thoreau? Thoreau's "practice" is profoundly individualistic. It does not imply a restructuring of society on the basis of philosophical theory or the testing of the correctness of a theory by its practical application. Thoreau's practice was mere-

ly the introduction of theoretically interpreted ethical norms and concepts into individual life experiences, for wisdom, as Thoreau saw it, was essentially and profoundly intimate, and did not presuppose collective participation and search.

Thoreau's reduction of philosophy to wisdom, and subsequent immersion of wisdom in the mode of life, implied an intuitive-emotional rather than a rational assimilation of the world. Rigorous theories were rejected, but non-rigorous ones proved to be too unstable, almost shapeless. Thoreau's programme for the restructuring of philosophy was obviously vague. He therefore had to look for a different basis for his philosophical system. In his view, this basis was to be found in ethical rigorism.

The austere and rigid regulation of all, even the tiniest, details of conduct was extremely characteristic of the American philosopher. This made Thoreau's ethical worldview somewhat ossified. As a result, the philosophical mode of life became in practice a chain of paradoxical acts flagrantly challenging socially acceptable norms. The dictum quoted above—"the philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life"—was interpreted by Thoreau in a literal sense. In accordance with his basic conviction, every day and even hour of life must be constructed on the basis of a detailed plan, and underlying even the smallest of actions must be profound thoughts.

Another important problem of Thoreau's worldview was the search for the place of a philosopher and wise man in the life of hu-

man beings. What was he, an observer or a participant in the turbulent events of life? On the one hand, Thoreau called the philosopher an impartial and wise observer of human life. On the other, the philosopher had to be, according to Thoreau, a teacher whose example should inspire men. In what way did the philosopher combine profound contemplation with vigorous activity in the vortex of events? Thoreau was aware of this antinomy, but he refused to admit the absolute incompatibility of these two views of the world. The search for a synthesis of contemplation and the individual's social activity was an important part of the American philosopher's theoretical and practical work.

Imperturbable contemplativeness, i.e., undisturbed observation of the world of nature and men, leads, in Thoreau's view, to comprehending the meaning of life, which is the ultimate goal of the wise man's activity. Here is an example of this type of cogitation: "June 4. I sit here this fourth of June, looking out on men and nature from this that I call my perspective window, through which all things are seen in their true relations. This is my upper empire, bounded by four walls, viz., three of boards, yellow-washed, facing the north, west, and south respectively, and the fourth of plaster, likewise yellow-washed, fronting the sunrise,—to say nothing of the purlieus and outlying provinces, unexplored as yet but by rats.

The words of some men are thrown forcibly against you and adhere like burrs" (99, 7, 80).

In order to understand life, Thoreau be-

lieved, one must not be present in it, for your presence changes it, and the truth disappears under the cover of mundane vanity. But mere contemplation, albeit inspired by the desire to comprehend the truth, did not satisfy Thoreau either, for knowledge had to be effective, it had to be useful.

In an attempt to solve this problem, Thoreau drew this parallel: "Zeno, the Stoic, stood in precisely the same relation to the world that I do now. He is, forsooth, bred a merchant—as how many still!—and can trade and barter, and perchance higgle, and moreover he can be shipwrecked and cast ashore at the Piraeus, like one of your Johns or Thomases.

"He strolls into a shop and is charmed by a book by Xenophon—and straightaway he becomes a philosopher. The sun of a new life's day rises to him,—serene and unclouded,—which looks over Στοά. And still the fleshy Zeno sails on, shipwrecked, buffeted, tempest-tossed; but the true Zeno sails ever a placid sea. Play high, play low,—rain, sleet, or snow,—it's all the same with the Stoic... When evening comes he sits down unwearied to the review of his day,—what's done that's to be undone,—what not done at all still to be done. Himself Truth's unconcerned helpmate. Another system of book-keeping this than that the Cyprian trader to Phoenician practiced" (99, 7, 26, 27).

This discourse is not quite characteristic of Thoreau, who found it hard to visualise a philosopher practicing trade or some other form of commerce; although the autonomy of spirit and its freedom in relation to empirical

being was one of Thoreau's premises, the requirement of integral personality was just as important for him. The life of Zeno the Stoic did not satisfy that requirement, being split into two kinds of being, as it were,—the true (spiritual or philosophical) and the non-true (corporeal, material)—opposed to each other and resulting in the splitting of personality. In Thoreau's opinion, under no circumstances can a philosopher and wise man have a split personality! The philosopher is thus again faced with a contradiction. He therefore modifies the formulation of the problem. A wise mode of life, he says, does not assume practical activity in general but precisely philosophical activity aimed at the spreading of the right attitude to the world. A most important aspect of this philosophical activity is construction of one's own life. This proposition, however, entailed yet another contradiction: philosophical activity became encapsulated within a caste, men were divided into teachers and disciples, and the philosophy of wise men was gradually isolated from life. Thoreau's search thus came full circle.

He tried to steer a middle course between extremes. He recalled again and again the advantages of those poets, philosophers, naturalists, or any other people who occasionally engaged themselves in some other business, differed from their main occupation, and looked at things from aside, as it were. The philosopher was thus expected to relinquish the posture of the indifferent observer and immerse himself in the vanity of existence. This was obviously a half-and-half solution, and it did not satisfy Thoreau himself. But

the thinker's theoretical horizon was limited by the framework of contemporary society, which did not allow him to basically change the standpoint, to see philosophy not only as an explanatory academic discipline but also as a science transforming the world. Thoreau's desire to bring philosophy closer to men's real needs through introducing the concept of philosophical mode of life remained on the whole unrealised. But his tireless search in this direction made his creative career a landmark in the development of American thought in the 19th century.

CHAPTER I

THE STAGES OF LIFE: BOOKS, PERSONALITIES, EVENTS

A brief biographical note is not sufficient for a thorough analysis of the philosophical heritage of such "non-academic" thinkers as Henry Thoreau, for his life story became in his case an integral part of his worldview, an important aspect of the "Odyssey of the spirit" involving all elements of the philosopher's being. This "Odyssey" absorbed generalised contemplations and emotional-moral evaluations of the surrounding life, which soared to the plane of complex and at times agonizing theoretical reflections of the inner Self, only to be immediately dissolved in the living sensations of real being.

The philosopher's path could not be a logically perfect chain of hypotheses, experiments, and tests. His quest for ideas was inevitably fraught with contradictions, wavering, noble aspirations and bitter disillusionment. The considerable distance in time, though, enables us to plot the general trend of Henry Thoreau's life and to identify its main landmarks.

Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817. His grandparents settled in the USA not long before the 1776 Revolution. Thoreau's paternal grandfather made a considerable for-

tune out of trading, but Henry's father, John Thoreau, was not so lucky, and soon lost the capital he had inherited. Finding himself without any means, Thoreau's father decided to set up a small graphite pencil factory. This home industry provided a small but steady source of income, though the family was far from prosperous.

David's mother, Cynthia Thoreau, was a good mixer, and very active socially. Henry was her third child. His elder brother John and sister Helen were quite enlightened people, although they received no proper schooling; for several years they taught at Concord's school. Both died in their youth. Thoreau's younger sister Sophia took care of him towards the end of his life, and did a great deal to collect his works and prepare them for publication.

Thoreau's childhood was in no way different from that of his peers. It should be pointed out, though, that from his early years the parents infused him with a passionate love of nature. Most of the credit for this goes to his mother. Young Thoreau spent the greater part of his leisure outdoors—in the woods, in the fields, and on the river. His relations noted his bent for contemplation, and even self-absorption, extraordinary for his age. Later he wrote that as a young boy when he had to stay indoors on Sundays with no interesting book to read, he used to sit by the window for hours on end waiting for the sunset and watching swallows high in the sky.

Apart from nature, the favourite subject of the family circle was religion. There were lively and even turbulent discussions of the vir-

tues and shortcomings of the two rival religious trends, Trinitarianism, or Puritanism, and Unitarianism. The matter did not end in verbal disputes only: Thoreau's parents would hurry to strike out their names from the lists of one congregation and to add them to another's. These changes of heart were fairly frequent. The confessional issue was by no means insignificant at Concord. No one would even dream of rejecting the existence of God. If there were any atheists, they preferred to keep their views to themselves, for atheism was seen much in the same light as high treason, not only in Concord but throughout New England.

The first 102 settlers who fled from the persecution of the Anglican Church on the *Mayflower* and landed in 1620 in Massachusetts were Brownist Congregationalists. The countless hardships in no way weakened their religious zeal. When they settled on the new lands, they established an order marked by an even greater intolerance than that of the Anglicans. The new England Puritans—"those sober virtuosi of Protestantism" (1, *1*, 705)—were obsessed by the idea of establishing in Massachusetts a theocratic political system in accordance with Calvin's ideas. They were also guided, of course, by purely economic considerations, not just religious motives. Primitive accumulation of capital in England led to a rapid development of industry and the growth of cities which, however, only partially absorbed the rural population deprived of their land. To support themselves, the peasants agreed to cross the ocean under the worst possible conditions, hoping to gain free-

dom and land there. New vistas also opened here before the English commercial capital, which saw the natural wealth of the American continent as a source of profit.

No wonder the principal figures in early New England society "were the minister and the merchant; and these twin authorities—joined after the Revolution by the rising profession of the law—ruled in patriarchal fashion the inarticulate mass of the yeomanry" (82, 272). We see both merchants and ministers among Thoreau's ancestors, so that in this sense the family traditions should have accumulated the most characteristic features of the New England model personality.

The years when young Thoreau's views took shape were those of religious strife, when "John Calvin was finally put aside" (in the words of Vernon Parrington, a sober and thoughtful historian of American philosophy) and Unitarianism asserted itself as a creed which accorded better with the interests of the developing New England bourgeoisie. Unlike the rest of Protestants, Unitarians rejected the dogma of the Trinity and of the fall from grace; they also recognized equality of all men. Unitarianism, the dominant religious trend in Thoreau's time, became adapted to the structure of New England society and thus acquired the status of an orthodoxy, against which it had so vigorously protested. On coming of age, Thoreau pronounced his own verdict on the controversy between the two Protestant sects: when he received a tax sheet from the Unitarian church, he refused to pay the tax and announced his decision to leave the community. But he did not join any

other congregation, which roused amazement and indignation among his neighbours, and earned him the reputation of an atheist. When he was asked, not long before his death, if he had thought of the other world, he replied, "One world at a time."

The future philosopher was even more resolute in rejecting his other inherited profession, commerce, regarding it as one of the principal evils of his times.

In 1827-1830, Thoreau attended first the Concord Academy and then the Concord Lyceum. Despite their fine-sounding names, these were elementary schools providing a minimum of education in preparation for future careers.

In 1833, Thoreau entered Harvard. In his later life, Thoreau seldom recalled his Harvard years. He described the system of education there as an example of a system alien to men's true interests. Many years later, Emerson remarked in a conversation with Thoreau that all branches of knowledge were represented at Harvard, to which Thoreau sarcastically replied: "You are right, all branches and no roots." However, despite his critical attitude to Harvard, Thoreau's student years were quite profitable. He thoroughly studied classical culture, ancient and modern languages, literary and philosophical monuments of the past as well as works by contemporary writers. His personal library was small but carefully selected.

Thoreau's philosophical education in the proper sense was fairly confused and fragmentary. Considering the state of philosophical education in the USA in the first half of the

19th century, there was nothing surprising about this fact at all. Paul Kurtz, the well-known authority on American philosophy, writes this on the subject: "New national religious denominations were organized and while many liberal arts colleges were founded under religious leadership, an independent philosophy did not have a conspicuous place in their curriculums. The radical deistic spirit [of the Enlightenment] was no longer in evidence, and philosophy was now approached as an 'edifying' subject and was frequently taught by the college president, who was also a clergyman. Philosophy was considered under three headings—natural, mental and moral. It was assumed that the purpose of philosophy was to demonstrate the divine order of the universe and to justify the existing order of society ... that philosophy was approached chiefly as an 'applied science' relating to theology, morality, and politics" (57, 85). That was the rule, and Harvard was not an exception, although it recognized two "non-religious" philosophers—John Locke and Dugald Stewart, member of the Scottish "common sense" school, who made it academically respectable.

Today, researchers point out—on the whole justly—the unoriginal character of Thoreau's writings from his Harvard years. But these writings also show something quite different—the author's independent attempts to sum up the knowledge gained in the classroom, the influence of Transcendentalism on him, and the consistent drive towards self-education.

Discipline at Harvard was not very rigorous, and in his third year Thoreau skipped several

months to teach at school. At that time he was greatly influenced by the Utopian ideas of Robert Owen. It was in that period that he came to know Orestes Brownson, then pastor of the local Unitarian school. The two young men became good friends. Thoreau began to study German under the guidance of Brownson, who was an ardent student of the German classical philosophy. He wrote later that "the short six weeks" spent with Brownson were "an era" of his life, "the morning of a new *Lebenstag*" (55, 27).

Brownson was remarkable among the New England Transcendentalists for his inclination towards the working class movement, in which he actively participated. In the opinion of the American writer J. W. Krutch, Brownson was a "champion of economic radicalism closer to Marxism" (55, 27). This is an obvious exaggeration, but it indirectly confirms the fact that New England Transcendentalism had a wide range of social interests.

In 1837, Thoreau wrote his commencement piece "The Commercial Spirit" and defended it in a public debate. According to an oft-repeated legend, he refused to receive his diploma, unwilling to pay the five-dollar tax that was required in such cases. The legend seems to be quite likely, considering Thoreau's scrupulousness: he might well regard as insulting the rules stipulating that the degree could only be conferred on those "who proved their physical worth by being alive three years after graduating, and their saving, earning or inheriting quality or condition by having Five Dollars to give the college" (5, 175).

Soon after graduation Thoreau began to teach at the Conrod Lyceum, but his teaching career lasted several weeks only. The trouble was that a system of corporal punishment reigned in American schools, this running counter to Thoreau's pedagogical principles, and he spoke out rather sharply against that system. The board of trustees pressed Thoreau's resignation, since the willful teacher proved to be too troublesome. In the months that followed, the economic depression, which reached its lowest point in 1837, made the prospect of finding a job almost non-existent. Even quiet provincial Concord felt the consequences of the economic crisis enveloping the whole country.

Early in the 19th century, young American capitalism was making great strides. Rapid economic growth was facilitated by the availability of rich sources of raw materials and manpower, relative freedom and flexibility of social institutions, and the fact that, as Goethe put it, the road of American society was not obstructed by basalt ruins of feudal castles. In his *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* Marx wrote that America was a country in which "bourgeois society is not developing on the basis of feudalism but in which it has originated from itself; in which it does not appear as the surviving product of the development of centuries but as the point of departure for a new development; in which the State, in contrast to all previous national forms, was from the start subordinated to bourgeois society, to its production, and could never claim to be an end in itself; in which bourgeois society itself,

combining the productive forces of an old world with the immense natural terrain of a new one, is developing on an unprecedented scale and in unprecedented [conditions of] freedom of movement and far surpassing all previous achievements in ... mastery of the forces of nature..." (1, *28*, 6). The 1820s and 1830s saw the beginning of a decisive industrial upheaval in the USA. It started in the north-eastern states. Machines, water- and steam-engines were used widely, canals and railroads were built, one running through Concord, and telegraph lines were established. The cotton industry developed faster than others. Massachusetts, Thoreau's native state, became the centre of this industry: half the US textile production was concentrated there.

The rapid growth of American economy brought about the development of social, political and economic conflicts, just as rapid. The textile factories of New England were not just models of technological innovation—they were also the scene of crude exploitation, including the abuse of child labour.

The economic crisis of 1837 caused mass unemployment. The agrarian upheaval that started then in New England complicated the situation. Numerous small farms were ruined, and their former owners joined the urban proletariat. Surrounded by fields and farms, Concord was a witness of this tragic and painful phenomenon. An inhabitant of a provincial town, Thoreau was sensitive to any changes in the social reality. He was never indifferent to all sorts of manifestations of evil, injustice, or political intrigues. His high sensitivity to moral issues was of the greatest

importance for his worldview. It was in 1837, on October 22, that Thoreau made the first entry in his *Journal*. It has come down to us almost in full and is one of the most interesting specimens of literary-philosophical-naturalist writing in the entire 19th century. Almost daily, Thoreau wrote several pages in it. Over 25 years, the *Journal* became quite a voluminous manuscript.* The principal value of this work for us is that it gives the possibility of studying consistently, and in great detail, the spiritual world of the writer and philosopher, of recreating his intellectual quest.

At first, the entries were not intended for publication, they were merely everyday working notes, but gradually their role changed. The journal became Thoreau's *alter ego*, a living entity with which Thoreau argued, agreed or disagreed. The title *Soliloquies*, invented many centuries before by Marcus Aurelius, would have suited Thoreau's *Journal* best. The *Journal* is simultaneously creation and analysis of an artistic-philosophical reality, an endless pursuit of the evanescent phenomenon of nature, a desire to grasp it in thought and to find man's place in it.

In 1838, Thoreau, assisted by his elder brother John, opened a private school. It was quite a success, and well-attended. Thoreau's educational methods ruled out corporal punishment entirely, and that alone was a radical innovation. Thoreau endeavoured to hold most classes outdoors, bringing the pupils

* The *Journal* comprises 14 out of the 20 volumes of Thoreau's *Writings* (Boston-New York, 1906).

as close to the world of nature as he could; he also included those subjects in his curriculum which helped his pupils in their practical life. The school lasted some three years.

It was also in 1838 that Thoreau delivered his first lecture at the Concord Lyceum, a local enlightenment society. In the years that followed, almost all his life, Thoreau lectured there, once or twice a year, on philosophy, natural science, and socio-political issues. Most of these lectures later became the basis of essays published in journals. Thoreau was quite a success as a lecturer, despite his weak, toneless voice. His audiences listened with considerable interest to his descriptions of familiar neighbourhoods. But when the speaker moved on to philosophical subjects, the listeners became restless: they were not very keen on Transcendental philosophy.

After his return home on graduation from Harvard, Thoreau made the acquaintance of Ellen Sewall, daughter of a Unitarian clergyman. Invited by Thoreau's relatives, the girl spent a summer with the Thoreaus in Concord. In November 1839 Henry propositioned Ellen in writing, but his suit was coldly rejected. The girl obviously liked Thoreau, but her decision was made for her by her parents; those orthodox Unitarians regarded Thoreau as "one of those radicals". Thoreau remained a bachelor to the end of his days. This unfortunate romance has intrigued many researchers. However varied the biographers' opinions and hypotheses, they agree that the ruin of Thoreau's hopes for marrying Ellen was a traumatic influence that made itself felt over many years.

In 1840, Thoreau made his first contributions to the *Dial*, organ of the Transcendental Club. The journal was launched and edited by Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), a Transcendentalist, writer, critic, translator into English of Johann Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. The contributors to the new journal included some major figures in the history of American philosophy and literature, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Channing, Theodore Parker, Elizabeth Peabody, and others. During the four years of its existence, the *Dial* reported various facts of protest against established modes of thought, and commented on current philosophical literature. Those who wrote for the journal said of themselves that they were all united by their faith in social progress, love for the truth, and an aspiration for personal freedom. Their hearts belonged more to the future than to the past.

Emerson soon became the sole editor of the *Dial*, and he involved Thoreau more and more in working on the journal. Thus the April 1843 issue was entirely prepared by the young philosopher. In just four years Thoreau published some thirty articles in the journal—original papers and compilations. These were naturalist and literary-critical essays, as well as texts from Oriental philosophical schools and comments on them: "Saying Confucius" (1843), "The Laws of Manu" (1843), "Chinese Four Books" (1843), "Preaching of Buddha" (1844).

At about the same time Thoreau made the acquaintance of Amos Alcott (1799-1888), an American poet, philosopher and educational-

ist who started out in life as a pedlar. Alcott's main interests lay in the field of education; the basis of his pedagogical system was the principle of harmonious moral and physical education of adolescents. He introduced human physiology as a school subject, for which he was dismissed as an obvious atheist. In 1844, Alcott founded the Fruitland experimental cooperative farm,* which he saw as an embryo of a future ideal society. Alcott became a close associate of the Concord Transcendentalists, especially of Thoreau.

Friendship with Alcott proved to be a source of faith in the possibility of genuine human relations between men today. Despite the outward differences of inclinations, the two philosophers were tied by links of profound spiritual affinity. Thoreau wrote these lines full of admiration for his friend: "One of the last of the philosophers ... he peddled first [the] wares [of his state], afterwards, as he declares, his brains... I think that he must be the man of the most faith of any alive. His words and attitude always suppose a better state of things than other men are acquainted with, and he will be the last man to be disappointed as the ages revolve... A true friend of man; almost the only friend of human progress... Of yore we had sauntered and talked, and effectually put the world behind us; for he was pledged to no institution in it, freeborn, *ingenuus*" (100, 311-312).

In 1841, at a time of considerable financial

* The farm building still exists. It is situated in one of the suburbs of Boston and houses a museum now.

difficulty, Thoreau accepted Emerson's invitation to settle at his home as hired carpenter, gardener and general handyman, in return for room and board.

Association with Emerson, head of the Transcendentalists, played a great role in the intellectual development of Thoreau. Emerson came to Concord in 1834 and soon published his famous essay "Nature", which became the manifesto of Transcendentalism. Emerson and Thoreau became good friends, although later the relations grew much cooler. One of the reasons for that might be that Thoreau took too much to heart the persistent accusations that he copied Emerson's philosophy and life-style. Emerson's growing conservatism and inclination towards academism could also inspire Thoreau's distrust. But the relations between the two philosophers were never actually broken off. After Thoreau's death Emerson made his famous speech in which he praised highly his colleague's personality and activity; in later years he did a great deal to promote the publication of his works.

In 1842 Thoreau met Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), the writer who formulated the aesthetics of Romanticism in America. The future famous novellist met Thoreau at Emerson's house, when Thoreau cut the flowers for Hawthorne's wedding. Of considerable interest is the portrait of Thoreau drawn in Hawthorne's notebook: "Mr. Thoreau is a singular character; a young man with much of the wild, original Nature still remaining in him, and so far as he is sophisticated, it is in a way a method of his own. He is as

ugly as sin; long-nosed, queer-mouthed and with uncouth and somewhat rustic manners ... though courteous ... corresponding with such an exterior. But his ugliness is of an honest and agreeable fashion, and becomes him much better than beauty ... he has repudiated all regular means of getting a living, and seems inclined to lead a sort of Indian life...

"He is a keen and delicate observer of Nature ... a *genuine* observer, which I suspect is almost as rare a character as even an original poet. And Nature, in return for his love, seems to adopt him as her especial child; and shows him secrets which few others are allowed to witness. He is familiar with beast, fish, fowl and reptile, and has strange stories to tell of adventures and friendly passages with these lower brethren of mortality. Herb and flower, likewise, wherever they grow, whether in garden or wildwood, are his familiar friends. He is on intimate terms with the clouds also, and can tell the portents of storms. He has a great regard for the memory of the Indian tribes, whose wild life would have suited him so well; and, strange to say, he seldom walks over a plowed field without picking up an arrowpoint, spearhead, or other relic of the red man. Will all this he has more than a tincture of literature; a deep and true taste for poetry, especially for the elder poets; and he is a good writer. At least he has written a good article,—a rambling disposition on Natural History, in the last *Dial*, which, he says, was chiefly made up from journals of his own observations. Methinks this article gives a very fair image of mind and character ... so true, so innate and literal in observation

... yet giving the spirit as well as letter of what he sees..." (quoted from: 55, 42-43).

On Emerson's recommendation, in 1843 Thoreau went to Staten Island, New York, to become the tutor of Emerson's nephew. Thoreau's impressions of the city are summed up in one sentence: "I walked through New York yesterday—and met no real and living person" (55, 63). In New York, Thoreau was introduced to Horace Greeley (1811-1872), a prominent public figure and journalist, editor of the *New York Daily Tribune*. Greeley took a lively interest in Thoreau as a person, and in his ideas. During many years he lent his support to Thoreau's literary-philosophical efforts, trying to find publishers for him; he also advertised Thoreau's essays in his newspaper and published favourable reviews of them.

During his sojourn in Staten Island, Thoreau wrote a review of *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men* (London 1842) by J. A. Etzler, a German Utopian socialist. Under the title "Paradise (to be) Regained" the review was published in the *Democratic Review* in November 1843. Etzler developed ideas consonant with those of Charles Fourier, insisting that if men joined forces in harnessing and transforming the forces of the wind, the sun and the tides, the earth would be a paradise. Thoreau's review was not only an analysis of a concrete work but also a presentation of his own views of Utopian socialism as a whole.

The spreading of Utopian socialism in the USA was a remarkable chapter in the country's history in the 19th century. Its ideas

first came to North America in the 1820s captivating the minds of many of Thoreau's contemporaries. Experiments on a grand scale were mounted on the basis of these ideas. The popularity of various Utopian notions was determined by the strength of their ties with social practice (see 49, 9). The first system of Utopian socialism that rose to the level of a national movement was Fourierism; it existed for nearly ten years (1840-1850) and gave rise to almost forty communes.

New England Transcendentalists were also carried away by the general enthusiasm for social experimentation among many radical-minded Americans. One of these Transcendentalists, George Ripley (1802-1880), abandoning his priesthood, set out to organise a commune on the principles of Transcendental brotherhood, mutual assistance and spiritual enrichment of personality. Thoreau and Emerson were sceptical about this sort of experimentation and Brook Farm—Ripley's commune not far from Concord—was not an exception. Thoreau was personally acquainted with most of its members, and was on a friendly footing with them, but his attitude towards the experiment itself was invariably negative. His rejection of communal experiments followed from his conviction that any political or economic programmes must be preceded by moral reform.

In the mid-1840s, Thoreau's worldview drifted towards individualism. His elder brother's death, the failure of his efforts to find a place in society, the failure of most members of the Transcendental Club to

understand him—all these external circumstances drove Thoreau to meditate constantly on the advantages of solitude and of lonely life. Of course, there were also inner reasons for that—a socio-philosophical logic of an unusual variety that led the thinker to assert the ideal of escape from reality.

On Independence Day, July 4, 1845, Thoreau settled in a cabin on the shore of Walden pond, intent on implementing the principles of simple life and on demonstrating his personal independence from the economic system of a social order that was alien to him. Thoreau spent two years and two months at Walden. The principal outcome of those years was the draft of his book *Walden or, Life in the Woods*—Thoreau's main work and a true masterpiece of world literature which, however, brought no fame to its author during his lifetime. The final version of the book was written much later, after Thoreau's return to Concord, and it was only published in 1854.

The fate of a literary or philosophical masterpiece is always unusual. The exceptional nature of such a work wreathes the author's personality and the history of writing the masterpiece in a halo of legend. *Walden*, so famous in these days, is indeed legendary.

Thoreau spent all his life in an intense search for criteria of moral purity, simplicity of human relations, and harmony between the world of men and the world of nature. This search grew into an epic which sometimes raised the philosopher to the pinnacle of an ecstatic sensation of the fullness of being, and sometimes pushed him to the brink

of hopelessness. Thoreau's existence in provincial Concord, devoid of any fatal upheavals, contrasted with a never ending creative construction, oblivious of self, of a universe of his own, of a romantic microcosm, a crucible in which were melted down the ideals of Philistinism, of gloomy Protestant pietism, and which was filled with the romanticised cult of pristine nature and faith in the future of genuine democracy. That is the content of *Walden*—Thoreau's book of confessions.

It is not merely an account of Thoreau's life in a cabin in the woods. This treatise, which has a complex artistic-philosophical form, reveals the author's worldview and outlines the elements of his cosmology, of his conception of man and nature, and his views on society and the progress of civilisation. The range of artistic-philosophical methods employed by Thoreau is truly amazing: from a sensualist interpretation of reality in the spirit of Locke to its highly abstract symbolic explanation. All this rests on the principle of transcendent spirituality permeating the being of the world. The purely philosophical analysis undertaken in *Walden* is complicated by the presence in the text of mythological elements and a tendency toward myth-creating. The author's pressing desire to experience emotionally and to grasp mentally the phenomenal world to its very depths resulted in a quaint mixture of diametrically opposed elements, both of methodology and of content.

Walden is both a socio-ethical Utopia, which now has many followers in the USA

and in many other countries, such as Japan, and an American version of Romantic philosophy; it is also a specific genre of literature, one that flourishes in the 20th century, and a naturalist treatise that still has some scientific value. First and foremost, this book is a passionate call for looking closely at the flow of everyday affairs, persons and objects, and for trying to find among them features of the unusual and the noble, of the living and the developing, a call for rejecting everything that is not worthy of these noble definitions.

Thoreau's worldview is profoundly optimistic, and that makes his *Walden* especially attractive to the modern reader. We succumb to the hidden philosophical rhythm of the narrative, following Thoreau into the endless world of untouched pristine nature which is, according to the Romantic philosophy, the aesthetical and ethical antipode of the industrial city. But the opposition between man and society, society and nature was absolute in character only in terms of the external course of events. Although Thoreau experimented in philosophical solitude, he was not, in fact, either a hermit completely disappointed in life or a nihilistically minded escapist. His escape into the woods was ultimately prompted by a desire to find a source of moral certainty, and he did find it, though not in isolation from society but in the thick of events, in the rapid flow of history.

We can argue endlessly whether a purely historico-philosophical analysis of *Walden* is justifiable, and whether the artistic element in it is stronger than the philosophical one.

But once we read or reread this remarkable work with professionally unprejudiced eyes, the very basis for such an argument disappears, for the depth of the book's meaning offers enough scope for both philosophical and literary-critical research. But the greatest value of *Walden* lies in the moral charge which fuses literature and philosophy.

Late in July 1846, while still living on the banks of Walden pond, Thoreau went to Concord for a few hours, to get his boots back from a cobbler. He was arrested in the streets of the town and sent to prison for nonpayment of federal taxes. For Thoreau, refusal to pay federal duties and taxes was a form of protest against the government, which actually encouraged Negro slavery and started a war in Mexico. The following morning a certain well-wisher paid the required sum, to Thoreau's great indignation, and he was freed. During the night spent in prison the philosopher conceived a plan for a treatise covering the entire range of moral-political relations between the individual and the state. This plan was later realised first in the lecture on "Civil Disobedience" and then in the essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" (1848).

That essay was the second work which made Thoreau's spiritual heritage an object of close study in the 20th century. The essay was not born of abstract speculation but as a passionate and resolute response to concrete phenomena of current political life—a response formulated by a philosopher capable of seeing greater things underlying individual facts. Thoreau's profound interest for socio-philosophical subjects was consonant with the

epoch he lived in, an epoch when the movement for the abolition of slavery developed in the USA.

The history of the American republic began with "one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars of which there have been so few compared to the vast number of wars of conquest" (2, *28*, 62). The fact that the War of Independence, the American Revolution of 1776, was a popular war of liberation, imposed an indelible imprint on the subsequent history of the nation. Under pressure from the popular masses, the Declaration of Independence was adopted. Written by Thomas Jefferson, leader of the radical wing of the revolution, it declared the equality of all men and the right of each individual to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. "The first Declaration of the Rights of Man" (1, *20*, 19) was like a call to arms for Europe, then largely dominated by semifeudal monarchies. The American people then faced the task of implementing the ideas of that document.

However, even the 1776 Revolution clearly showed the conservatism of the major landowners and financiers. The US Constitution was to some extent a conservative reaction against the results of the Revolution; it curtailed the democratic achievements of the Revolution; it even did not rule out the possibility of establishing in the USA of a monarchy after the British model. The "American tradition" was thus determined not by a basic, God-inspired democratic spirit of the government institutions of the New World but by the hard struggle between the democratic line

expressing the aspirations of the broad popular masses and the interests of the conservative circles drifting more and more to the right.

Thoreau's youth fell on the years of the so-called Jacksonian democracy, the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1829-1837). At that time, a hard blow was dealt to those who wanted to establish in the USA an open dictatorship of financial and industrial capital. The country was shaken by major actions of workers and farmers. But it was also in those years that the expansion continued into the territories of the Indian tribes, in the course of which the indigenous population of North America was ousted out and destroyed. With a shrewdness that was remarkable for that age, Thoreau denounced the omnipotence of the rich, however democratically it might be camouflaged.

In the meantime, Thoreau was looking for ways of analysing the relations between the individual and the state that would be different from the generally accepted ones. He took the individual's spiritual world beyond the system of legal relations within the state, as it were, and regarded the two entities as absolutely opposed to each other. In this, Thoreau's consistently critical attitude towards American reality became the basis of his doctrine of pacifism, of non-resistance to evil, and not of a revolutionary programme.

1849 saw the publication of Thoreau's book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. The events described in it occurred in 1839. Thoreau devoted a chapter to each day of a trip through Massachusetts he made

with his brother. The work as a whole showed that, as a writer, Thoreau joined the "big league" of literature. His talent had grown strong and mature. The book proved Thoreau's first major work to be published in his lifetime. Apart from descriptions of landscapes, it contained excursions into abstract philosophical, religious and literary subjects, taking up about half of the entire manuscript. More than any of Thoreau's works, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* was infused with Transcendentalist ideas; considerable space was given to the exposition of the Transcendentalist conception of man. In a passage on religion Thoreau outlined views that greatly puzzled his pious readers: he criticised the whole of the Christian system of beliefs. Despite Emerson's attempts to help, all publishers rejected the manuscript, for one reason or another, and Thoreau rewrote it after each rejection. Finally a Boston publisher agreed to produce the book at the author's expense. Only 218 copies were sold in four years, and in 1853 the publisher told Thoreau to remove the rest of the printing from their storehouse. "I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes," remarked Thoreau with bitter irony, "over seven hundred of which I wrote myself" (99, *12*, 459).

Although Thoreau began to practice literature and philosophy professionally, he did not give up manual labour either, earning his living by it. In 1847-1850 he worked as a forest inspector and surveyor. Besides, Thoreau helped his father with their home pencil factory. Work in a poorly ventilated

room filled with clouds of graphite dust ruined his health. He soon developed symptoms of hereditary tuberculosis.

In the late 1840s, Thoreau's enthusiasm for the natural sciences grew. Transcendentalist motives disappeared almost completely from his journal, supplanted by endless descriptions of natural-scientific facts and observations. The impression is that Thoreau accumulated data for future scientific generalisations. Although the latter were never made, Thoreau's works on natural science won fame and recognition among scientists. In 1850 the philosopher was elected a corresponding member of the Boston Society of Natural Scientists.

1854 was marked by a significant event in Thoreau's life: publication of *Walden or, Life in the Woods*. Horace Greely first advertised the publication and later printed a fine review of it. Reviewers from other papers differed in their assessment, but on the whole the book had a good press and sold well. Thoreau's personality, and his ideas outlined in *Walden*, attracted the attention of the reading public; some of the readers, though not very many, became his followers and disciples.

In that same year 1854, in response to the passing of a law on the capture of runaway slaves, Thoreau lectured at the Concord Lyceum on "Slavery in Massachusetts". This lecture considerably extends our notion of the socio-philosophical views of Thoreau, who emerged as a conscious adherent of the abolitionist movement. Although formally Massachusetts was a free state, said Thoreau, an anti-Negro mood was cultivated there in

the interests of southern planters.

Abolitionism was a major ideological and political movement in mid-19th-century America; its goal was the abolition of slavery and liquidation, in fact, of the planter class itself. The movement reflected deep-seated social processes—a sharp polarisation of the economic and political interests of the North and the South. The planter system ruled out the use of machines, irrigation, technical innovations and inventions in agriculture. The narrow specialisation of southern agriculture and its relative backwardness stood in the way building a national economy. Due to the disproportionate and deformed division of labour, the South depended on the North, and the development of Northern industries was greatly hindered by the backwardness of the South, mostly due to the absence of markets (see 105, 31).

When the abolitionist movement first took shape, the industrial circles of the northern states did not realise yet that it was in their vital interest to abolish slavery. They were afraid that the struggle against slavery would grow into a broader political movement. Many industrialists of the North were linked with the South by economic ties; their goal was therefore restriction of slavery rather than its abolition. The first abolitionist organisations took shape in the USA as early as the 1830s. By the 1850s, the continued existence of slavery in the South became an overriding issue, one on which the country's entire economic and social future developed. In Boston, there existed in the 1850s "The Parker Circle" whose members resolu-

tely advocated the liberation of Blacks. Apart from Theodore Parker, the circle included Thoreau and many of his friends—Emerson, Alcott, William Channing (see 105, 129). Anti-slavery attitudes were very strong among the inhabitants of Concord. All the members of the Thoreau family shared abolitionist views. Thoreau himself actively participated in the movement, doing his share for the "underground railroad", that is, helping runaway slave to escape to Canada, and criticising slavery in his theoretical works and essays. Despite this, Henry Canby, a prominent American researcher, insists that Thoreau was not an abolitionist, for he did not belong to any abolitionist organisation (see 43, 13). This statement is hard to accept.

As early as 1844, Thoreau published an open letter in the *Liberator*, edited by the leader of abolitionists W. L. Garrison. Thoreau's letter, entitled "Wendell Phillips before the Concord Lyceum", was an account of a series of lectures delivered by that major tribune of Northern abolitionism, a man of unshakeable will combining great spiritual energy and a most noble way of thought, a man who won recognition even among his opponents. Thoreau and Emerson, who won, after a hard struggle, a position on the board of the Lyceum, were the actual organisers of Philips's lectures, and did everything to increase their popularity. Philips's lectures, which had a revolutionising effect on the public, also produced a great impression on Massachusetts society. In the words of Engels, Phillips "did more than anyone else, with the

exception of John Brown, for the abolition of slavery and the conduct of the war" (1, 35, 174).

In 1857, Thoreau met Captain John Brown (1800-1859), one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement. The philosopher came to respect deeply the personal qualities of the Kansas fighter for the liberation of Blacks. They met a second time in 1859, on the eve of the uprising in Harpers Ferry. Thoreau apparently knew nothing of the preparations for the uprising, but he was completely on the side of the courageous fighters as he watched the events with trepidation.

The tragic defeat of the insurgents and their trial spurred Thoreau to vigorous activity in organising a campaign in defence of John Brown. Thoreau called a protest rally in Concord, and, when the town hall's bell-ringer refused to sound the tocsin, Thoreau did that himself. In a short space of time he made dozens of speeches, taking up a collection for the benefit of the condemned men. The most famous of these was "A Plea for Captain Brown" (1859). It marked a new stage in the development of Thoreau's socio-philosophical ideas. In it, there was a tendency to revise his former principle of non-resistance (see 106).

In 1856, an important event occurred in Thoreau's life, of which the full significance only became clear much later. On Emerson's recommendation, Thoreau, together with Alcott, went to see Walt Whitman (1819-1892) at his home in Brooklin, New York. Thoreau was one of the first to appreciate the work of the great American poet; later, he sharply protested against the view, widespread among the

Philistine public, that Whitman's poetry was obscene. The worldview basis of Thoreau's work was close to that of Whitman.

A sharp deterioration in his health (his chronic bronchitis developed into an active pulmonary process) made Thoreau go, in May and June 1861, to Minnesota, to try a change of climate as a last remedy. On his way there, he stopped at Niagara Falls and Chicago; he spent only a month at Minnesota. The trip did him no good, and he returned home. A year later Thoreau could no longer leave his house on Main Street in Concord. Surrounded by his friends and discriples, he never moved from his room. The stream of visitors increased from day to day, and Thoreau had a welcome for each of them. When asked by a pious visitor if he was reconciled with God, he replied, "I did not know that we had ever quarreled" (43, 15). On May 6, 1862 Thoreau died.

* * *

Thoreau's short life was uneventful. The philosopher spent almost the whole of it in an out-of-the-way corner of the American northwest. But his life was extraordinarily full of spiritual impressions, experiences and meditation. An eyewitness of major changes in the socio-economical situation in the USA, and of powerful political and ideological movements on a national scale, Thoreau was sensitive to everything that stirred the minds of the American people. Thoreau's ideas did not arise from armchair speculation but from a search for answers to burning questions put forward by the changing reality itself.

CHAPTER II

THE THEORETICAL SOURCES OF THE SYSTEM OF THOREAU'S VIEWS

Reading Thoreau's works, a historian of philosophy may be amazed at the almost complete absence of direct references to other philosophers. The impression sometimes is that Thoreau functioned in a kind of philosophical vacuum—so rarely are the names of other philosophers mentioned in his works. However, if we pass on from a superficial review of the texts to an analysis of their philosophical content, most of Thoreau's ideas will prove to have concrete philosophical sources.

In this connection, we must first of all deal with the philosophy of *American Transcendentalism.*

It is hard to establish with any precision the degree of influence of New England Transcendentalism on the formation of Thoreau's philosophy. The fact is that, in a sense, Thoreau himself was one of the fountainheads of this philosophy, he participated in the movement and for a while was seen as a zealous adherent of Transcendentalism. This assessment is doubted now and then by modern researchers, but the common view is that Thoreau's philosophy and Transcendentalism were very closely interwoven. Ameri-

can Transcendentalism largely took shape in the late 1830s, that is, before Thoreau began to play a prominent role in the intellectual life of Massachusetts; we can therefore regard Transcendentalism as one of the sources of the American thinker's worldview.

The Transcendental Club, founded in October 1838, included young writers, literary critics, philosophers, and religious reformers. The organisers and permanent members of the Club (whose number varied between 15 and 20) were some of the most prominent New England intellectuals; their spiritual leader was Emerson, made famous, as we have mentioned, by his treatise *Nature*.

Transcendental philosophy is not quite amenable to a rigorous meaningful description and conceptual-categorial analysis, the reason for which lies in the very spirit of the Romantic vision. Its founders rejected the very possibility of constructing a system of philosophical views covering all areas of human knowledge. They saw their worldview as open, in principle, to all philosophical arguments in favour of humanism, which implied the dominance of man's spiritual essence over the material conditions of life.

On the one hand, Transcendentalists continued the democratic and humanist traditions of the American Enlightenment, but on the other, they mounted an offensive against the materialist trend in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Their passionate desire to erect an ideological stronghold in the path of advancing bourgeois utilitarianism was their prime motive in creating a quaint philosophical programme combining both a

fierce critique of the American way of life and attempts to create a "true" idealism capable of inspiring hope in men and of lifting them above the level of everyday life's adversities.

The Transcendentalist doctrine was built on the belief in the existence of a certain extrasensual continuum of transfinite ideas somewhat reminiscent of Plato's eidetic kingdom. This explains, among other things, the absence in their works of references to their predecessors, generally accepted in philosophical literature. Just as all the other Transcendentalists, Thoreau believed that the borrowing of ideas from that continuum transfinite in regard of the real world need not be accompanied by the entirely superfluous references to the place, time and authorship of a given idea, this spatio-temporal and personal definiteness being entirely irrelevant. Transcendentalists did not at all aspire towards achieving progress in system-positing academic philosophy, and they therefore carelessly violated the rules of that science—they did not see it as too great a sin.

Lists of books which Thoreau read at different periods of his life—they have come down to us almost intact—show that he took a rather unusual approach to the history of thought. He closely studied obviously second-rate authors, ignoring the philosophical works of major thinkers. So far as we know, the books which Thoreau studied did not include the works of the classical German idealist school, or the Jena Romanticists, or Schiller, or Goethe's philosophical treatises. That does not mean, however, that Thoreau was comple-

tely unfamiliar with them. Of great significance among the Transcendentalists was the oral tradition: philosophical discussions, reading of papers, accounts of Americans returning from visits to Europe, public lectures on extremely diverse philosophical, sociological and religious subjects.

The Transcendentalists revered Kant, Fichte and Schelling. But they did not go in for a detailed analysis of the epistemological and ontological doctrines of the German philosophers. They wanted to absorb the very spirit of German idealism, its artistic imagery rather than the conceptual-philosophical aspects. In studying German classical idealism, the American Transcendentalists were therefore content with second-hand sources. These included Madame de Stael's *Germany*, offering a broad panorama of German philosophy, and Victor Cousin's *Fragments philosophiques* eclectically combining the intuitivism of the Scottish "common sense" school with Descartes' principles. Books by Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Coleridge, containing numerous passages on the history of German philosophy of the end of the 18th century, were also closely studied.

The affinity with the English Romantic interpretation of the philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Schelling prompted the basic parameters of the American Transcendentalists' philosophical constructions. But American Romanticism obviously has a strong national colouring due first and foremost to the special features of the historical development of the USA. Unlike European Romanticism American Transcendentalism was far

from idealising the Gothic perception of the world. Clearly realising the inadequacies of their social being, the Americans did not at all look pessimistically into their future; they therefore did not idealise the feudal forms of the social order but philosophically substantiated the demand for the implementation of the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the demand for true democracy, for equality of petty commodity producers, and for a harmonious union, spiritual union above all, with the infinite world of pristine American nature.

Sincere criticism of the social institutions was probably one of the most progressive aspects of the philosophy of Transcendentalism. "They were impatient of any falling short of the ideal, and their lives in consequence became an open indictment of a Yankee world given over to materialism" (82, 2, 384-385). However deep might the Transcendentalists be immersed in the contemplation of the harmonious structure of nature and man, each dismal fact of American reality made them abandon the extremely abstract philosophical meditation for the earthly world and trenchantly criticise such facts.

Despite a certain eclecticism of Transcendentalism, its general trend was obvious enough. "Idealism" was the term Ralph Waldo Emerson used to describe his system of views. That is too general a term, but, in a way, its very generality may have attracted the philosopher. Critically reinterpreting John Locke's empiricism, Transcendentalism, though it did not question the significance of "external", sensuous experience, called

in question the proposition that there is nothing in the intellect that has not been previously in the senses. Man's soul, the Transcendentalists believed, carries in it innate and intuitively realised truths; the main of these truths is the existence of a primordial and universal link between man and the transcendent depersonalised cosmic spirit. In their view, the world of phenomena was permeated by the presence of this transfinite spirit. Imposing a somewhat lax, and not very deep, interpretation on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Emerson and his followers made no distinction between the concepts of the transcendent and the transcendental. Both of these principles, the American Romanticists believed, exist as inseparably connected. The cosmic spirit, the transcendent, enables our mind to cognize the world in a priori transcendental forms. Following Kant, American Transcendentalists subdivided the intellectual domain of man's activity into intellect and reason. Intellect operates on sensuous data and synthesises them; it is entirely subject to the laws discovered by John Locke. But as far as cognition of a higher level was concerned—cognition of the deep-lying principles of the spirit—the human mind enters the kingdom of reason. The latter relies above all on intuition, revealing to man the true picture of the world. At the level of reason, the supreme principle or "over-soul", as Emerson called it, looms through the immense variety of phenomenal objects. The possibility of transcending sensuous experience exists at all times, for the individual spirit, far from being opposed

to the over-soul, is an integral part of it.

Transcendentalists saw sensually perceived objects as manifestations of a spiritual force. A firm link, or correspondence, was established between material and spiritual realities. Cognition was thus reduced by Transcendentalists to the search for such correspondences, and to revealing the symbolism of nature.

Continually trying to achieve a balance on the tightline separating subjective and objective idealism is also typical for the Transcendentalist conception of man. The individual was endowed with absolute and indisputable autonomy in regard of all the external social and natural phenomena. Only cognition of the over-soul would enable man, Transcendentalists believed, to break the fetters of alienation and establish a true contact with other men. "From this intoxicating conception results the idea of practical individualism, or Self-reliance" (32,3). Hence the idealist theory of collectiveness as transcendental unity of souls and not as unity of men linked by material, practical activity.

Historians of American philosophy often debate the question of the influence of Emerson's philosophy on Thoreau. This influence is sometimes exaggerated. However, it is enough to read Thoreau's early works—say, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* or the first volume of the *Journal*—to realise the thinker's originality: the influence of Emerson's Transcendentalism is especially great here, but it is obvious at the same time that Thoreau absorbed not all of his teacher's ideas. Particularly unacceptable to him were Emerson's spiritualist tendencies. Thoreau

attenuated, as it were, the idealist elements of Transcendentalism, endeavouring to adapt it to sober naturalism. He nevertheless counted himself as a Transcendentalist, as is clear from a diary entry he made in connection with an invitation from a naturalist society: "The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot... I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations... If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly" (99, *12*, 4-5). And yet Thoreau's evolution towards naturalism and his inevitable departure from clearcut Transcendentalism can be proved by documentary evidence. Only the first five of the 14 volumes of the *Journal* indicate that Thoreau belonged at one time to this trend of thought. Idealistically coloured Transcendentalist fragments are only present in Thoreau's later works as exceptions; they do not determine the overall picture of his intellectual evolution.

Another ideological source of Thoreau's philosophy was *Protestant ethics.* Transcendentalism in general and Thoreau's view in particular were obviously affected by the Protestant doctrine of man, by Protestant morality.

Thoreau's religious views are a complex and controversial issue. As we have said, Thoreau did not belong to any one of the directions of Protestantism, and he never

attended church services. References to Holy Scripture are fairly infrequent in Thoreau's works, and they are never used as arguments, only as illustrations. Following the general spirit of Plato's philosophy, Thoreau regarded the idea of divinity as entirely coinciding with the ideas of universally perfect beauty, wisdom and moral grace. Stopping just short of pantheism, Thoreau asserted that the world of nature is filled with depersonalised Transcendental spirituality. Intuitive revelation of this divine principle could not be the object of activity of any association of men—a church or a religious community; there must be no mediators between the absolute and man. Finally, God in Thoreau's conception was an abstract absolute underlying being and constituting the canon of the ethical and aesthetic ideals. A certain affinity with Schellingianism and German Romanticism made itself felt here.

Thoreau's views on ethics were clearly affected by Puritanism (Calvinism) and Unitarianism—the two more or less opposed trends of religious thought within Protestantism.

During almost the entire first two centuries of US history, Puritanism was the dominant religious ideology in the country's North-East. The ethical theory of Puritanism is critical of amusements and spiritual excesses, it preaches rejection of luxury, the individual's involvement with business activity, thrift and abstemiousness. One of the principal elements of Puritanism was the doctrine of man's self-perfection, in which man goes through a series of phases before reaching the acme of religious morality.

Although Thoreau did not accept wholeheartedly Puritan practice in its entirety, he absorbed, on the theoretical plane, a series of ideas of Puritanism, traditionally strong in New England, ethical rigorousness, material and spiritual asceticism, and the idea of moral self-perfection. These three propositions became the leading principles in Henry Thoreau's life; Thoreau did not give them any religious substantiation, rejecting the Calvinist doctrine of absolute predestination and divine grace. Thoreau applied the same method of sifting religious ideology and identifying purely philosophical elements in it to Unitarianism as well.

Unitarianism is characterised by faith in a depersonalised God the Father and asserts the historical reality of the person of Jesus, which is diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the idea of the divinity of Christ. Unitarians declare that man is God's beloved child. He must be guided by his reason, conscience and love of God. He has no obligations before God. This did away with the immutable Puritan dogmas of the original sin hanging over all men, and of absolute predestination excluding the freedom of will. To some extent, the whole colouring of the worldview underwent a change here: the gloomy pessimism of Puritanism was replaced here by optimistic Unitarianism marked by a certain aestheticism and tolerant (at least for the time being) towards other creeds; it stressed personal faith in "the only God whom our thoughts can rest on, and our hearts can cling to", "the God whose image dwells in our Souls"—in the

words of Walter Ellery Channing, the prominent American propagandist of Unitarianism (quoted from 82, 2, 326). As Channing said, worshipping God was often replaced here by worshipping good. Religion was declared a purely personal affair.

In fact, Thoreau accepted many of the ethical propositions of Unitarianism—with the essential difference that, wherever possible, he substituted the concepts of beauty, good and wisdom for the concept of God. However, the militant conservatism of Unitarianism in all the spheres of life, with the possible exception of religious dogma, was completely unacceptable to Thoreau. Actually, the most conservative socio-political forces of New England readily embraced the new faith, for in their view the vague verbiage concerning the worship of abstract good in no way threatened the caste differences in New England. The most influential members of Unitarian communities included, as a rule, enterprising businessmen, traders, industrialists, and landowners. The competitive spirit prevailed over all the arguments in favour of seeing the divine element in one's neighbour. The optimism of Unitarianism suited the hopeful, energetic businessmen who had no desire at all to dwell on the inevitability of retribution for their sins or on predestination. Unitarianism became the religion of those who succeeded in the race of life. Clearly, Thoreau was not going to follow their lead. To see that, it is enough to consider a table reflecting in generalised form the philosophical concepts of Calvinism (Puritanism), Unitarianism, and Transcendentalism.

The Enlightenment, American Enlightenment first and foremost, also made a great impact on the formation of the philosopher's views. True, it would be useless to look for an analysis or even a detailed presentation of the philosophy of the Enlightenment in Thoreau's works. He could hardly have had a thorough knowledge of the works of the French encyclopaedists or those of fathers of the American revolution. Their names are very rarely mentioned in Thoreau's journals and treatises.

The ideology of the American Enlightenment, which paved the way for the Revolution of 1776 and for the victorious War of Independence, made a profound impact on the consciousness of the broadest strata of Americans. This influence, which had a great many aspects, was most fully expressed in the invariable and unshakeable faith in the viability of the democratic form of government and state system. Of course, this faith often came in obvious contradiction with the concrete political reality after the Revolution. But, however striking these contradictions might be, the great faith in democracy on a very broad basis continued to live. Replacing the Enlightenment through the workings of historical logic, American Romanticism—a dialectical antithesis of the Enlightenment—retained that faith.

Probably more than any of his Transcendentalist colleagues, Thoreau was subject to the influence of the Enlightenment. Criticising from extreme Romantic positions the political institutions then existing in the USA, Thoreau continually used purely En-

	Calvinism (Puritanism)
1. God	Omnipotent, stern, unyielding, adhering to the letter of the eternal law in everything, compassionate only to those chosen to be saved. Triune.
2. Man	Vicious by his very nature, the burden of the original sin always hanging over him; completely separated from divine being before accepting the Protestant faith.
3. Grace	Given only to a few chosen individuals of God's will, through predestination.
4. Freedom of Will	Will is subject to divine predestination; is manifested only in following desires issuing from predestination.
5. Church	Part of the divine design, a means of salvation for the chosen.
6. Knowledge	Entirely follows from biblical truths and evidence interpreted through the chosen; nature resulting from divine providence.
7. Man and the State	A close, indivisible unity of cobelievers and the state; the idea of theocracy; the state as a most important part of the divine design.

Unitarianism	Transcendentalism
Compassionate and beneficent to all, constantly guarding man. Unitary.	God is the spirit. It lives in man, merging with the omnipresent over-soul.
Potentially and actually blessed.	Divine by his original nature.
Given to all desiring it.	Is present in everything and at all times.
Man is fully free to do good and evil.	Man is absolutely free to reveal his potential for the good.
Important but not absolutely necessary.	Completely foreign to man's nature; injurious.
Entirely follows from the Bible interpreted with the aid of reason, science and art.	Based entirely on intuition and reason.
Complete separation of church and state; the authorities must be respected, provided they do not obviously violate the laws of morality.	The individual principle prevails over state; in some cases, acts of civil disobedience are possible.

lightenment arguments. However consistently might Thoreau the Romantic try to prove the insignificance of the social aspects of life, Thoreau the Enlightener refuted his arguments, asserting the need to fight for the democratisation of the American system, for the enlightenment of the people. This inner contradiction of Thoreau's worldview was at the same time an important source of his philosophical development, which on the whole followed the Romantic path. Three representatives of the philosophy and literature of *English Romanticism* were especially widely recognised by American Transcendentalists and made a significant impact on the formation of Thoreau's views: William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). Through their knowledge of the works of these authors American Transcendentalists absorbed the ideas not only of English Romanticism but also of the Jena school of German Romanticism; they also formed a certain conception of the systems of Fichte and Schelling. In the work of Wordsworth Thoreau was most attracted by the aesthetic ideas outlined in his programmatic preface to the second editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). In a broader philosophical sense, American Romanticists, including Thoreau, perceived Wordsworth's obvious loss of faith in the reasonableness of a state built on the principles of equality of all citizens before a universal and eternal laws of justice. That did not, of course, mean that Wordsworth and the American Romanticists who followed him rejected men's natural equality.

On the contrary, they continually appealled to this equality, linking up the social realisation of it with the search for spiritual brotherhood between men rather than with establishment of a just state system.

Popular among the Concord Transcendentalists were also Coleridge's magazine *The Friend* (1809-1810) and his philosophical treatises *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and *Aids to Reflection* (1829). These works were infused with German classical idealism, which Coleridge had studied at Göttingen. Asserting the fundamental demand for eliminating the philosophical division of the world into Self and Nature, Coleridge wrote that "during the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs" (22, 137). Colleridge then argued that this contradiction could only be resolved by assuming the existence of a unified and indivisible being of subject and object. These two kinds of being do not merely accord with one another—they are simply identical: the existence of things outside us is unconsciously, intuitively included in our conscious being. The establishment of this identity must, according to Coleridge, be the duty of philosophy. The concept of spirit, fully identical with the concepts of 'Self' and of self-consciousness, becomes the starting-point of such a philosophy. However, will, addressing itself to self-consciousness, can separate off the objective side of knowledge from the subjective one. This separation, though, is secondary and derivative from universal identity, for in any case

the spirit must originally turn upon itself. "We begin with the *I know myself*, in order to end with the absolute *I am*. We proceed from the self in order to lose and find all self in God" (22, 146). Actually, the self is precisely the transcendent element, the divine spirit which dissolves in itself all the individual consciousnesses.

Coleridge distinguished between two types of knowledge—spontaneous (registering sensuous data) and philosophical (metaphysical); he believed that philosophical consciousness must reveal the beauty of nature to men spiritually perishing in the unnatural crowding of the cities; that it must show men that nature reflects the beauty of God, without which man's spiritual revival is impossible. In this broad and generalised interpretation, philosophical knowledge organically included intuition, imagination and fantasy, which in its turn created the premises for art—the highest form of spiritual activity. The Romantic symbiosis of philosophy and art, preached by Coleridge, was directly absorbed by Emerson's Transcendentalism.

Emerson saw Coleridge as an outstanding ideological ally. As for Thoreau, he absorbed not only the spirit but also, in a sense, the very letter of Coleridge's Romanticism. However, Thoreau was unwilling to go too far in the subjectivisation of the external world. A merging with the world of nature would have to be achieved, according to Thoreau, through the dissolution of self in nature, not vice versa. He never doubted the objectiveness of the external world.

Thomas Carlyle, especially his treatise

Sartor Resartus, made a much greater impact on Thoreau than Coleridge; *Sartor Resartus* became one of the principal sources of American Transcendentalism. The task of studying Carlyle's influence of Thoreau is made easier by the fact that nearly all of Thoreau's most important statements on Carlyle are collected in one work, the critical essay "Thomas Carlyle and His Works" (1845) written after a long and painstaking research in Carlyle's philosophy. Giving his general assessment of the English thinker's work, Thoreau wrote that he was for them the image of the whole of Great Britain, that his works were the gospel for the youth of his age. "But merely reading," he wrote further, "even with the best intentions, is not enough: you must almost have written these books yourself. Only he who has had the good fortune to read them in the nick of time, in the most perceptive and receptive season of life, can give any adequate account of them" (99, *4*, 322).

A comparative analysis of the views of Carlyle and Thoreau shows that the point which was common to both thinkers was, above all, the symbolic method of interpreting reality. First demonstrated by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, it was applied by Thoreau in the first chapters of *Walden*. These thinkers also have many points of contact in the principles of critique of civilisation and in their presentation of social institutions as integuments or symbols that have to be explained if the essence of social phenomena is to be cognized.

But, just as in his treatment of Coleridge, Thoreau refused to accept the subjectivist motives of the English thinker's philosophy.

He also rejected many of Carlyle's social views, his "feudal socialism". Sharing in principle the disappointment, characteristic of the English Romantics, in the results of the Great French Revolution of 1789-1794, and their lack of faith in the possibility of a reasonable restructuring of society through revolutionary movements, Thoreau was far from glorifying patriarchal feudal relations. He invariably looked forward to the future, he believed in the need to fight for the democratisation of American society—if only on the moral plane.

An important source of Henry Thoreau's philosophical work was the ideological heritage of the *Scottish school of common sense*. Modern researchers in Thoreau's philosophy differ in their evaluation of the impact of the school of common sense on his world-view. Thus Ch. Gruber points out that particularly popular among Harvard students were the works of Dugald Stewart, but he insists that there is no objective evidence of the influence of that Scottish realist on Thoreau (41, 113). E. Todd and J. J. Kwiat entirely disagree with Gruber's view. They believe that Thoreau not only had a thorough knowledge of Stewart's texts but also preferred them to Locke's empiricism. In the 1830s, Harvard became the scene of conflict between the adherents of Lockean sensualism and empiricism, on the one hand, and the adepts of the Scottish school of common sense, on the other, the realism of the Scottish school being, on the whole, preferred. Harvard students took the side of Stewart who recognised—in direct opposition to Lo-

cke—the existence of innate ideas in man; these included the idea of God, the idea of faith in the existence of the object of perception independent from the perceiver, the idea of the existence of the subject, the idea of a steady development of nature in the given direction, and the idea of certain anticipations of the future in the soul of man. All these ideas were believed to be innate, i.e., intuitively clear to all individuals and absolutely necessary for normal development of experience.

John Locke was a kind of a saint to the early Unitarians, when the Harvard intellectual elite embraced a different faith—Scottish realism, obviously aimed against Locke—the way was cleared for Transcendentalism. "This is not to imply any synonymity between Scottish philosophy and New England Transcendentalism," Joseph Kwiat notes, "but rather to suggest that the philosophy of Reid, Stewart, and Brown possibly served as a useful transition between Locke and Transcendentalism" (59, 88-89). Robert Dickens, a modern researcher in Thoreau's philosophy, unhesitatingly attributes Thoreau's intuitivism to the influence of the Scottish school of common sense. This view is primarily based on an analysis of Thoreau's works of the Harvard period (see 24, 20-22). Although in later years Thoreau abandoned many of his early philosophical convictions, the influence of Scottish realism on him apparently left its traces. Professor Harding, the most authoritative specialist on Thoreau's heritage, writes this: "The prominent position of the Scottish philosophy in the Harvard

curriculum, the Scottish philosophical inclinations of the instructors, Thoreau's direct references to representatives of the Scottish school ... and the correspondence between his ideas and their own indicate a major influence, particularly in aesthetic and ethical matters, by the end of his junior year" (43, 114). This conclusion must obviously be accepted.

Yet another source of Thoreau's philosophical views was *the culture of the East*—an object of special reverence and even worship on the part of the Transcendentalists.

"I bathe my intellect," wrote Thoreau, "in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagavat-Geeta..." (100, 198). Apart from that, he read the Vedas, the Vishnu Purana, the laws of Manu. For the first time in the history of the USA and possibly of Europe, the philosophical ideas of India, China and Persia became widely known in these countries. The attractiveness of Oriental philosophy to the Concord thinkers was by no means an accident: the Transcendentalists were aware of the affinity of their ideas and the philosophy of the Upanishads. Besides, Thoreau was greatly impressed by his discovery of the remarkable and obvious affinity between the ideas of Oriental philosophers and Transcendentalists which existed despite the vast spatial and temporal distances between the two civilisations. This discovery confirmed one of Thoreau's most important assumptions: true knowledge is eternal and absolute, it does not become obsolete neither is it invented, it can only be rediscovered. The East became a symbol of

eternal and immutable wisdom for Thoreau.

Emerson's doctrine of the over-soul is reminiscent of the idea, consistently implemented in the Upanishads, of the unity of the Brahman (the objective spirit) and the Atman (the subjective psychic element). Just as the Brahman, the Transcendentalist over-soul is a living, dynamic spirit, the source and receptacle of the infinitely varied phenomenal forms of being. It is infinite not in the sense of excluding everything finite but in the sense of being the inner basis of all things finite. Just as the Brahman, the over-soul is not reducible to thought, to the thinking spirit, it is a living unity of essence and existence, of the ideal and the real—of knowledge, love, and beauty.

The idea of the involvement of the individual soul with the cosmic spirit, elaborated in great detail in the Upanishads, became a fundamental one for Thoreau and the Transcendentalists. The human Self, the individual consciousness, could not think, conquer and love nature, were it unthinkable, unconquerable and unlovable (see 86, 140). The Upanishads assert that nature is reasonable and fully cognizable, being part of the whole to which the individual consciousness belongs. Nature is formed, inspired and directed by the fusion of Atman and Brahman.

Thoreau follows the Upanishads in epistemology as well, believing that intuitive cognition is higher than all the other rational modes of assimilation of being. Intellect can only provide an external description of the world in the categories of space, time and causality. The truly Brahmanic (transcenden-

tal) reality lies beyond rational categories. The self-sufficient Brahman does not depend either on time or on space or on causality. Only intuition is capable of overcoming the limitations of intellect and of achieving a union between individual consciousness and cosmic spirit.

Thoreau knew Chinese philosophy from the works of Confucius and Mong Dsi. Besides, the American writer studied *The Great Teaching* by Tseng Tzu which systematised the Confucian heritage. A result of this study was Thoreau's article "Chinese Four Books" in the *Dial*—a series of documents on the history of Confucianism with comments.

Despite the obvious affinity between Thoreau's Transcendentalism and the doctrines of some schools of ancient Oriental philosophy, the role of the latter in the formation of his worldview need not be exaggerated. As Thoreau said himself, he completed his writings on the Chinese and Indian sacred books *after* he had formed his own views similar to Oriental philosophy (see 32, 13). In W. Harding's opinion, what "Thoreau found in the Oriental literature was a reflection and confirmation of ideas and attitudes already achieved" (43, 100). But familiarity with Oriental philosophy undoubtedly made a significant impact on Thoreau's philosophical views.

When employed on the *Dial*, Thoreau edited materials coming from Germany, and thus became familiar with *German philosophy*. True, this was mostly acquaintanceship with comments, summaries and

reviews rather than original sources. H. A. Pochman, author of the fundamental study *German Culture in America*, wrote in this connection that "there is nothing to indicate that he read Kant or Schelling; and yet there can be little question that in one way or another (whether through Emerson, Coleridge, the reviews, or the transcendental climate around him), he learned something more than the dictionary definition of the word *transcendental*" (84, 433). The name of Goethe occurs in Thoreau's works more often than that of any other German thinker. In his journals from the late 1830s and early 1840s the American philosopher cited passages from Goethe's autobiography, from *Wilhelm Meister* and *Italian Travels*; these passages show that the ideas of the two thinkers on a wide range of aesthetic problems were quite similar.

Thoreau's works show signs of direct influence of Johann Georg Ritter von Zimmermann (1728-1795), the English King's physician in ordinary, author of the four-volume treatise *Betrachtungen über die Einsamkeit* (1784-1785, see 108). In 1791, the first English edition of that book, which was a sensational success throughout Europe, appeared, and after 1793, Zimmermann's treatise was several times reprinted in the USA as well. Thoreau included it in the inventory of his personal library. Zimmermann can hardly be called a philosopher in the proper sense of the word—he should rather be seen as a moralist writer of the same type as Chesterfield, La Rochefoucauld and partly Rousseau. Zimmermann saw solitude as a

universal antidote against the decay of morals undermining society, citing numerous ethical, economic and religious arguments in favour of his view.

To conclude our overview of the theoretical sources of Thoreau's philosophical worldview, we must mention the *culture of antiquity*. He was exposed to its influence already in his Harvard years. But Thoreau continued his studies in classical philology and philosophy after graduation as well. Volumes of Homer, of Greek lyrical poets (Pindar and Anacreon) and playrights, above all of Aeschylus (*Prometheus Bound*, *Seven Against Thebes*) were his constant companions. Thoreau's favourite philosophers were Plutarch (*Parallel Lives*, *Moralia*), Iamblichus (*Jamblichi de vita Pythagorica liber*) and Porphyry (*De abstinentia*, on abstinence from animal food). Among the Latin authors Thoreau preferred the poets—Vergil, Horace and Ovid.

In the late 1850s, the American naturalist and philosopher became interested in the treatises of the Neoplatonists, and also in the natural-philosophical and natural-scientific works of Aristotle, Theophraste and Pliny the Elder. This interest reflected the general trend in the evolution of Thoreau's philosophical worldview—his gradual loss of interest for transcendentalist subjects and growing inclination towards the natural sciences. But Thoreau's general orientation remained Transcendentalist: he revered the great monuments of philosophical and artistic thought as relics surrounded by a mysterious halo rather than as sources for direct practical conclusions. For him, the *Iliad* symbolised

wisdom in its pristine classical form. That was why Thoreau took Homer's poem with him to the shores of Walden, but that was also why he did not believe it necessary to open that book too often. Thoreau looked to the works of ancient Greek and Roman thinkers for confirmation of his own ideas, and not for ready-made solutions of theoretical problems facing him.

* * *

An overview of the basic sources of Thoreau's philosophical worldview shows that his great erudition was almost always merely a background but not the basis of his own discoveries and achievements. As we follow the evolution of Thoreau's interest for the works of any given philosopher or writer, we mostly see that he retained, with a striking and apparently spontaneous consistency, an originality of approach to whatever he might be reading. Almost never did he follow obediently the logic of the author's reasoning or argumentation, bringing instead his own order to whatever he read, in accordance with his own theoretical convictions. That was the cause of his fragmentary or mosaic use of the sources. However, negation of the influence of previous philosophy on Thoreau would be just as unacceptable an extreme as exaggeration of that influence.

CHAPTER III

THE SYMBOLIST WORLDVIEW

The Romantic philosophers' indefatigable attempts to find a dynamic and at the same time precise form of expression of world perception resulted in changes not only of the traditional views of the character of philosophical knowledge but also of the mode of its presentation.

1. Between Image and Concept

A comparative analysis of the two traditions in the history of philosophy—"academic" and "non-academic"—shows that representatives of each of them tended to different styles and genres. Thus in their endeavour to make philosophy a living science of wisdom, "non-academics" paid special attention to the language and style of philosophical narratives. They addressed themselves to the non-professional reader, attempting to make philosophy comprehensible to all. This approach imposed specific demands on the methods of construction and presentation of their views. Characteristic of the American Romantics was a desire to avoid cumbersome conceptual-categorial structures. This depar-

ture from conceptuality increased the role of artistic imagery, so that philosophy became similar to art. Although non-academic philosophers did not eliminate the specificity of philosophy as an independent science, they employed, in proving and substantiating their propositions, devices characteristic of art, in the first place those of literature. This shift towards the artistic assimilation of the world involved not only forms of presentation (style, language, genre, etc.) but also inner structural characteristics of knowledge.

Thoreau's work was original and even unique in that art and philosophy were naturally combined at all levels of his worldview; philosophical problems prevailed here, as far as content was concerned, while art was dominant in terms of form. But how precisely was this combination achieved? How was it reflected in the principal structural elements of philosophy and art—in concepts and images? To answer these questions, let us turn to the original sources.

Certain passages of *Walden* are amongst the finest landscape descriptions in American literature: "This small lake was of most value as a neighbor in the intervals of a gentle rain storm in August, when, both air and water being perfectly still, but the sky overcast, midafternoon had all the serenity of evening, and the wood thrush sang around, and was heard from shore to shore. A lake like this is never smoother than at such a time; and the clear portion of the air above it being shallow and darkened by clouds, the water, full of light and reflections, becomes a lower heaven itself so much the more

important" (100, 63). "The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale," Thoreau writes in another passage, "and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description" (100, 121). The descriptions of the forest lake abound in naturalist detail. Several pages are devoted to a poetic description of the waters of Walden, the forest around it and the sky above it.

At first sight, such fragments are of no interest for the historian of philosophy. But as the perception of the text gradually deepens, one sees that Thoreau's vision of the landscape is profoundly philosophical: "...the opposite shore arose stretched away toward the prairies of the West and the steppes of Tartary affording ample room for all the roving families of men" (100, 64). Thoreau tries to combine here, as it were, concrete space with the Earth's geographic space arising before his mind's eye; the author's thought takes on a cosmic colouring.

Some of the descriptions of the waters of the lake are even more philosophical: "It is well to have some water in your neighbourhood, to give buoyancy and float to the earth. One value even of the smallest well is, that when you look into it you see that earth is not continent but insular ... all the earth beyond the pond appeared like a thin crust insulated and floated even by this small sheet of intervening water, and I was reminded that this on which I dwelt was but dry

land" (100, 64). "A lake is the landscape's beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluviatile trees next the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around it are its overhanging brows" (100, 128).

Thoreau sees a deep transcendental meaning in almost each natural phenomenon and in each interaction between nature and man. This is how Thoreau describes his emotions while fishing: "It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonal themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook" (100, 121). Then, the following poetic lines are obviously allegoric:

It is no dream of mine,
To ornament a line;
I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.
I am its stony shore,
And the hollow of my hand
Are its water and its sand,
And its deepest resort
Lies high in my thought.

(100, 133).

Thoreau opens up the distant horizons of his philosophical thought without warping

the artistic fabric of his landscape descriptions, though the thought becomes, step by step, ever more imageful and at the same time generalised and abstract. The overcoming of the empirically given, even in its artistic, figurative form, is accompanied by a sharp growth in the philosophical content of the text. The artistic image of Walden becomes transparent, lit up by abstract associations. As David Greene, a Thoreau student, remarked, "Thoreau's images and symbols tend to fall into clearly definable categories" (40, 7).

Central to Thoreau's book is the image-concept of Walden. Other image-concepts are flow of water, ocean, pinetree, heaven, night, morning, spring, home, sounds, clothes, speed, savage, wilderness, solitude, etc. All these are unusual ideational image-bearing elements of his worldview, meaningful units carrying the main ideological content of the text. The identification of the inner structure of these philosophical-artistic entities will give the researcher a key to the explanation and interpretation of Thoreau's work.

Even a superficial inspection of the image-concepts forming the basis of Thoreau's worldview prompts the conclusion that we are dealing here with a symbol or some form close to symbolic. According to A. F. Losev's definition, a symbol is "an ideational, image-bearing, or ideational image-bearing structure pointing to certain objects, distinct from this structure, for which it is a generalisation or an unexplicated sign" (29, 5, 10). This definition can be used in the analysis of the mean-

ingful structures of Thoreau's works. Let us consider again the image-concept of Walden, or lake.

First, it assumes the existence of an object basis, i.e., of a concrete lake with objectively identifiable temporal and spatial characteristics.

Second, Walden is transformed into an artistic image of a lake in general, with all the attributes inherent in an artistic image (generalisation, emotional and ideational charge, links with concrete and typical features, etc.).

Third, the artistic image begins to emit flares of meaning obviously passing through an integument of artistic generalisation. We have a "pointing" to other phenomena and domains of meaning—those that have no direct meaningful links with the artistic image. Thus at an intermediate level of symbolic abstraction the term "Walden" acquires meaningful invariants ("mirror of the soul", "telescope", "source of renewal", etc.) which have no direct roots in the original image. At the next stage these roots become in general fairly illusory. What direct logical link can, in fact, connect the concept of lake and that of the cosmic or, say, of the individual spirit, or Self? These domains of abstract philosophical meaning are not revealed, there is merely a "pointing" to a future transcendence of meaning beyond the confines of the empirically given.

Fourth, a domain of properly transcendent meanings of philosophical concepts emerges (such as the soul, cosmic spirit, nature, etc.)—concepts existing in the "over-

image" sphere and forming a distinct system of mutual relations and influences. That is precisely what is called symbolic meaning.

In most general terms, philosophical meaning may be said to be transcendent and transcendental in relation to artistic image. The meaning inherent apriori in the image transcends or emanates beyond the limits of this image infused with abstract generalised meaning. This most essential feature of symbols is stressed by Sergei Averintsev: "The category of image assumes an object's self-identity, whereas the symbol category stresses the other aspect of the same essence—the transcendence of the image beyond its own limits, the presence of a certain sense intimately fused with the image but not identical to it" (54, *6*, 826).

Thoreau did not identify the lake, neither as a real object nor as an artistic image, with concepts pertaining to the sphere of symbolic meaning. From Thoreau's viewpoint, it would be wrong to say that the lake is the spirit or that the image of the lake is a concept (or image) of the spirit. And yet he indubitably recognised the deep meaningful link between the object-imageful and abstract conceptual domains.

Thus two spheres are clearly identifiable in the structure of symbols: the domain of the object-related artistic image and that of deep philosophical meaning or, in other words, the domain of imageful objectness and abstract meaningfulness. There exists a field of dynamic ideational tension between the two. Destruction of even one of the poles leads to a disintegration of the symbol as an

integral structure: in this case, either meaning loses its existential reality or the object-related artistic experience dissolves into its constituents. This lends tension and mobility to the entire ideational-imageful construction of the symbol, causing a conflict and an interpenetration of its emotional and intellectual parameters.

Since a symbol carries a potential energy of meaning, the question arises of the direction of the possible movement and development of the symbol. This brings into play yet another property of the symbol—its ability to unfold into an infinite semantic series, or its functionality. Losev writes this on the problem in hand: "The essence of a symbol is that it is never the direct givenness of a thing or of reality, but something *specified*; not the thing itself, or reality as generation, but the thing's or reality's *generative principle*; not the offering of it but *assuming* or positing it" (68, 378-379).

Unfolding the artistic image of lake into a series of particular and singular phenomena, we introduce movement in the symbol and activate the domain of abstract meaning. This process turns into the reading of the riddle or discovery of the meaning of the symbol (in this case, spirit or cosmic element) in all its dialectical interconnections. The lake as a symbol comprises, in latent form, all possible functional properties of the spirit.

Functional expansion has yet another aspect, namely parallelism between the object-imageful and philosophical-meaningful domains. A careful analysis of the functions of the lake image in the system of the work's

artistic images will yield certain senses of this image. In other words, the image will be described from different angles. The lake appears as an example of aesthetic perfection, as a symbol of inexhaustible depth, as a personification of constant mutability (the form remaining stable), as eternity, as a source of moral purity and purification, etc. Owing to a parallelism at a different level, these properties are manifested as the meaningful properties of the spirit symbolised by the lake.

The expansion of the lake image into a series reveals the secret of the domain of transcendent meaning. However, this parallelism of the inner levels of the symbol must not be interpreted simplistically, as a model of a certain rigid similarity or frozen analogy. The sphere of transcendent meaning is not only conjoined with the object domain—it is also autonomous in relation to the latter. In a sense, an artistic image becomes merely the first phase, a preliminary to the philosophical-meaningful domain. But the attainment of the level of transcendent meaning does not invalidate all the links with the artistic image content which is still present at this level, in some degree or other. Whatever high and abstract generalisations the lake symbol might lead us to, these generalisations carry elements of objective image content, albeit in sublated form. On the other hand, although the level of object-related image content does not carry open manifestations of transcendent meaning, it implicitly points to the presence of such meaning. A hint at "something different" is clearly discernible in even the most non-

philosophical descriptions of Walden; a haze of allegory (but not of cumbersome "profound meaningfulness") is distinctly felt in even the most realist details and characteristics.

A symbol must be divided into constituents only under the condition of full realisation of the conventional character of such an operation. The indivisibility of two domains or levels of symbol, their interpenetration, results in the fact that "any symbol always conceals a kind of mystery or riddle which has to be decoded" (68, 379). But this mystery is no more than an illusion resulting from an unusually high meaningful content of the symbol. However that may be, a symbol requires not only a rational decoding (which will inevitably be incomplete) but also a slow emotional penetration or immersion, for a symbol cannot be described fully enough in terms of a schematic division of the senses. The reading of Thoreau's texts also demands a certain penetration; the striking artistic merits of his prose make this process of immersion or growing into the text more accessible than it otherwise might be.

The correlation of rational (conceptual) and irrational (emotional) levels is yet another source of the development of the ideational-imageful structure. "The symbol lives by the antithesis of the logical and the alogical, of the eternally stable, comprehensible—and of the eternally unstable, incomprehensible, and it is never possible to proceed from complete incomprehensibility to complete comprehensibility. The force and significance of the symbol lies in its eternally arising and

eternally melting meaning energies, and its comprehensibility is taken by its irrepressible energy to the infinite depth of incomprehensibility, of apophantism—and just as irrepressibly it returns from that depth to the light of intelligent and pure contemplation" (65, 121).

There are several reasons for Thoreau's resort to symbolism. One of them was the popularity of the symbolist method among West European and American Romantics. The use of symbolism by Thoreau, a representative of the "non-academic" tradition in philosophy, was by no means accidental. The symbol as the principal meaningful element of the philosophical worldview fully accorded with Thoreau's requirements. Filled with transcendent meaning, the symbol immerses a particular phenomenon in the "first element", and makes possible an integral interpretation of the world in terms of that phenomenon. The symbol merges in fact with the philosophical concept, although, unlike the latter, it retains a certain emotional colouring even in the sphere of abstract meaning.

The symbol's semantic play, its indefiniteness and at the same time universal scope have become a favourite object of analysis in the philosophy and literature of Romanticism.

2. The Romantic Picture of the World

The Romantics saw a maximally precise expression of the birth and evolution of life in its entire dynamics as the most important

goal of their artistic-philosophical creativity. The Romantics sought for equivalents to the organic structure of the world among "organic" artistic and philosophical forms. The work of an artist-philosopher was identified with the work of nature. The symbol, with its inherent mobility, depth and inexhaustibility became one of the most important elements of the "organic principle". Novalis, the most prominent representative of Jena Romanticism, wrote that a symbol did not act directly, it incited to activity.

Regarding the symbol as an ideal form of expression of rapidly flowing, elusive thoughts and states of the spirit, Novalis asserted a most important philosophical proposition of Romanticism according to which an idea could not be expressed by a single thesis. An idea was an infinite series of theses, an irrational magnitude that could not be fixed, an incommensurate magnitude. (Wasn't the eternal irrationality relative?) The law of its progress, though, could be established.

The Romantics are attracted by the symbol's ability to yield a dynamic picture of a "general sense" through overcoming the image's concreteness.

Noteworthy is also the obvious philosophical individualism growing out of Romantic symbolism. The fact is that the symbol embodies the cult of both the creatively active and the individual principle. Each individual penetrating into the symbolic structure of a text discovers its meaning anew, as it were; the impression that arises here is not so much of a quest as that of constructing the domain of transcendent meaning.

In the view of the Romantics, this process is purely individual and intimate. They saw this fact as yet another confirmation of absolute activeness of consciousness-spirit.

Unlike most Romantic thinkers, who formulated a merely poetic theory of symbols, Schelling made an attempt to fill this theory with rational-conceptual content. Schelling's theory of symbols, which undoubtedly made an impact on American Romantics as well, rested on two fundamental categories: schematism and allegory. According to Schelling, schematism is a mode of presentation in which the particular is observed through the general or, to put it differently, the general designates the particular. Allegory is a method of presentation in which the particular portrays the general, and the general is contemplated through the particular. A symbol is an absolute unity of schematism and allegory, their organic synthesis; it is therefore absolute form combining the properties of allegory and schema to the point of absolute indistinguishability (91, 426).

Schelling's theory of symbol had yet another significant aspect, namely the assertion of the ontological status of the symbol, which thus became not only a form of presentation but also a form of the world's being. A solution of this philosophical problem in the framework of the Romantic worldview was of fundamental significance for Thoreau, too. Schelling asserted that organic nature is "symbolic, for here the endless concept is linked with the object itself, the general is entirely the particular and the particular the general" (91, 430-431). Of

course, the absolute-idealist nature of Schelling's worldview and of his theory of identity must not for a moment be lost sight of. "He who has not yet risen to such a level that the absolutely ideal is immediately given to him, and therefore absolutely real, is incapable either of philosophical or of poetical understanding," wrote the German philosopher (91, 411). Proceeding from this thesis, he identified the ideal forms of presentation of the real with the real itself. In clearer form this idea is expressed in these words of Schelling: "What we call nature is merely a poem concealed under the shell of a marvellous cryptogram" (11, 287). This idea was also shared by Thoreau—at least in the period of his creative evolution connected with Transcendentalism. The concrete historical roots of Thoreau's symbolism can be discerned in the philosophical theories of his predecessor Emerson.

Emerson presented a somewhat cruder version of Schelling's subtle arguments but at the same time lent them an artistic, imageful form, as he formulated these two principal propositions: "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts. Nature is the symbol of spirit" (26, 17). Drawing particular conclusions from these general ideas, Emerson wrote that corresponding to each phenomenon of nature is a state of the soul, and that the state of the soul can only be described through a portrayal of the corresponding natural phenomenon. According to Emerson's methodological schema, the transcendental symbolism of nature resulted in a description of nature be-

coming in fact a description of the states of individual consciousness in its relation to the absolute idea, to the over-soul. But do the phenomena of the outside world have a symbolic meaning? Is it intrinsically inherent in them? These are the questions that Emerson seems to ask himself, and he thus answers them: "Have mountains, and waves, and skies, no significance but what we consciously give them, when we employ them as emblems of our thoughts? The world is emblematic" (26, 21). If the world is substantially emblematic, the entire ensemble of natural phenomena becomes a collection of metaphors and symbols. Emerson's transcendental symbolism became linked up with his transcendental ontology.

Thoreau came very close to symbolism in its German and New England versions. He wrote that the objects and phenomena of Nature were original symbols, or images which expressed man's thoughts and sensations. Thoreau's work is a fine example of implementation of the Schellingian concept of symbol as an "organic" combination of idea and image. It is not excluded, though, that Thoreau may have borrowed from Emerson the idea of the ontological status of symbols.

Thoreau's symbolism was neither an accidental nor an exceptional phenomenon in the history of philosophy. Disappointment in the ideals of the rationalism of the Enlightenment produced a wave of irrationalism and intuitivism in European philosophical centres, such as Germany, England, and France. But the defeat of the Great French Rev-

olution profoundly affected the very foundations of ideological trends not only in Europe but also in America. "The first reaction against the French Revolution and the Enlightenment which is connected with it was naturally to regard everything medieval as romantic..." (1, *42*, 189). In philosophy, this development was determined by the loss of faith in the possibility of achieving a reasonable order in society, a loss of faith in reason in general. Symbolism, which acquired undoubted popularity among philosophers and writers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, was a very convenient form of introducing irrationalism in the philosophical worldview.

Criticising in his *Philosophical Notebooks* subjective idealistic interpretations of concepts, Lenin wrote that "there is nothing to be said against them [symbols] in general. But '*against all Symbolism*' it must be said that it sometimes is 'a convenient means of escaping from comprehending, stating and justifying the *conceptual determinations*' (Bergriffsbestimmungen). But precisely this is the concern of philosophy" (2, *38*, 119).

The Romanticism of New England Transcendentalists, retaining its idealist orientation, acquired a colouring significantly different from European Romanticism. European Romantics used the "mystery" and the "ineffability" of the symbol to write "hymns to the night", as Novalis did, whereas Thoreau used the Romantic method to compose a "hymn to dawn". Of course, Thoreau was not always uniformly optimistic; he was often caught in the grip of gloomy disappointment in the

ideal, and yet the general trend in the development of his views was determined more by his hopes for the future than by idealisation of the past. The rapid growth of American life, in the broadest sense, gave rise to expectations for the future—on the whole optimistic if at times troubled. The very progress of the American nation to the West, though fraught with contradictions and tragic circumstances, became for Thoreau an image of the flowering of man's potential, of his infinite possibilities. Unlike the Romantic Symbolists of Germany and England, Thoreau was never bent on opposing the ideal to the reality that surrounded him. The symbolic method, Thoreau believed, was capable of discovering the ideal in everyday ordinary being: "And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us" (100, 70). For all that, though, symbolism was at bottom an idealist method of assimilation of reality—which inevitably resulted in contradictions in the inner structure and a distortion of the overall world picture. The supranaturalistic underpinnings of Symbolism logically entailed spiritualist waverings.

Symbolism made a significant impact not only on the method but also on the structure of Thoreau's worldview. Corresponding to the division of Thoreau's world perception into the sensuous-artistic and transcendent domains was the structural division of being into the domains of the physical and the metaphysical worlds. Thoreau defined the status of each of these domains in accordance with

the Platonic objective-idealist tradition.

The material, or physical, world is real, but it is not as essential as the metaphysical or transcendent world. However, the external empirical experience must not be ignored, according to Thoreau, for it alone makes possible the link with the true, transcendent reality. "One must keep his senses honed and his consciousness vibrantly alert to it, that in the end he may come to understand the principles and ideas—the true realities—to which its innumerable [external] facets add up" (40, 9). For the human mind, the external reality is a construct created by consciousness through classification, through synthesising the chaotic experiences of the external world. Consciousness brings order into the world in its constant non-systemic evolution. The facts of external experience that are of little significance by themselves are extremely valuable as manifestations or embodiments of general ideas.

The fairly clearcut semantic differentiation of the domain of matter and that of spirit did not entail their polar separation in Thoreau's worldview. On the contrary, one of the most fundamental propositions of that worldview was that matter is permeated by the spiritual principle. Situated at opposite poles, matter and spirit exist in unity in the domain of the physical world.

The task that Thoreau set himself—that of raising the status of the material world while remaining within the Platonic tradition—was insoluble. In his attempts to solve it, though, he introduced mythological elements in the context of his worldview.

It was no accident that Thoreau resorted to the ancient mythological tradition: it followed from the very essence of philosophical symbolism. The symbol is always aimed at immersing a particular phenomenon in the universal, and at presenting by that device an integral image of the world. According to Hegel, a symbol is a myth sublated by the development of culture, extracted from its self-identity and realised in its failure to coincide with its own meaning (see 54, *6*, 830). Schelling also stressed the invariable and mutually conditioned affinity of symbol and myth. Therefore symbolism, interpreted not only as a methodological principle but also as the basis of a worldview structure, inevitably had to bring Thoreau to the use of elements of mythological consciousness. And that is exactly what happened.

But there were several stages in the development of the correlation of symbolic and mythological structural levels in Thoreau's worldview. Symbols like lake, tree, heaven, home, etc. became the meaningful elements of Thoreau's texts. But the imperative methodological requirement of symbolism compelled Thoreau to go still deeper and to look for simpler elements.

The simplification, or rather the division of the phenomena of the external world, interpreted as symbols, into constituents, was based on certain methodological foundations. Thoreau singled out concepts of the elements of the world, or the first elements: fire, air, earth, and water. His philosophical worldview is thus brought into contact, not

only internally but also externally, with mythological consciousness. This is directly linked with the irrationalist aspects of Thoreau's worldview. In the culture of antiquity, myths acted as imageful artistic analogies carrying a considerable philosophical meaning; they created a unified system in terms of which men in antiquity perceived the whole world. Thoreau brought the myth into the system of philosophical worldview because the laws of science, owing to their rational-conceptual form, do not in his view adequately describe the world; besides, he believes that by subjecting a system of symbols to mythological laws we can make it dynamic. The "elements of the world" proved to be those intermediate levels of the structure of Thoreau's worldview through which the symbol grew into the myth.

What is the nature of these first elements? According to Thoreau, it is dual. Reflecting the general structure of the symbol, each of the first elements comprised two spheres—concrete or empirical and transcendent or abstract. When certain "elements of the world" were mentioned in a philosophical context, that meant that he did not primarily refer to material elements in their physical aspect but to certain images which have a mediated symbolic link with the abovementioned material elements.

In December 1850 Thoreau made this entry in his *Journal*: "My feet are much nearer to foreign or inanimate matter or nature than my hands; they are more brute, they are more like the earth they tread on, they are more clod-like and lumpish, and I scar-

cely animate them" (99, 8, 124). Thoreau followed a scheme that was first formulated by Empedocle. In the hierarchic system of symbols, the earth personifies the complete of the spiritual. It is the material of dirt; it is hard and lifeless; finally, the earth is below, it is in the direction opposite to the upward movement. The neo-Platonic foundation of these symbolic-mythological notions is beyond doubt. The burden of negative "value" inherent in the earth as a symbol of non-spirituality is even shifted to social phenomena. Thoreau wrote of US laws condoning slavery that they have their life "only in the dust and mire, on a level with the feet" (99, 8, 177). But, although Thoreau portrayed the earth as an inert, lifeless mass of matter, he recognised its significance in the symbolic universe. Being the substance of death and disintegration, the earth is at the same time a passive but necessary basis of birth and growth. That is why all things living and spirited, whether plants, animals or men, though they do their best to get away from the earth, cannot, in view of their very essence, leave it, they cannot leave and develop without it.

Fully aware of the attainments of the natural sciences, above all biology, Thoreau by no means rejected their value. But he followed his philosophical orientation, in accordance with which the material world necessarily carries in it the presence of the transcendent world, the world of true reason and true essences. Thoreau's numerous discourses about natural phenomena were not only, and not so much, ideas about concrete phenom-

ena of the material reality as attempts to capture, retain and express the universal meaning of nature in terms of its "transcendence" and "spirituality". It is therefore not surprising that Thoreau did not turn to natural science (although he had great respect for it) but to philosophy arrayed in a symbolic mythological form, extremely conventional and at the same time artistically perfect. This complex two-dimensionality of Thoreau's texts must be borne in mind whenever we interpret his statements.

His treatment of the "elements of the world" demonstrates graphically his use of a dialectical device in philosophising: endeavouring to grasp and describe, as exactly as possible, the rapidly flowing reality with its play of semantic colours, he avoids unambiguous evaluations and judgments. As I have already mentioned, earth symbolises non-spirituality and at the same time constitutes in Thoreau's view the material basis of all that is. In a sense, spirit is just as impotent without matter as matter is dead without spirit. These are two aspects, though not equally important, of one and the same world.

Another first element, the one following earth, is fire. Unlike earth, it is a carrier of the activeness and motion of the universal world order. The principal property of fire is, in Thoreau's view, its ability to purify and to change everything with which it comes into contact. In other words, fire becomes the principal agent of changes occurring in the world. Following the classical tradition, Thoreau speaks of internal and external fire. The former shows semblance to the

warmth of the soul, or pneuma. "Every man carries fire in his eye, or in his blood, or in his brain" (99, *8*, 41). But inner fire is directly linked with external fire and the landscape in which this external fire is present. In *Walden*, inner fire performs four functions: it is a source of pain, purification, warmth (heat), and animation. A fifth function of fire can also be pointed out: it is a source of light.

Light is, in Thoreau's opinion, spiritual or transcendent fire. The sun provides an example of organic union of fire and light. It warms the earth and gives strength to the seeds of plants in the earth. The rays of the sun draw the shoots upwards, and that is why the light (the sun) is a creative and regulatory force of nature. For man, the fire of the sun is of just as great a significance as for external nature. Light coming every morning recreates anew, as it were, the entire world around man, which acquires at night a different meaning. This makes light a means of renovation of our knowledge of the world. Just as the warmth of the sun evaporates the waters of rivers and lakes, drawing vapour upwards, so does man's soul aspire to go upwards, in the direction opposite to the non-spiritual firmament (see 99, *1*, 203-204). The symbolic concept of star is close to those of fire, light and sun. The sun itself is regarded by Thoreau as the morning star, one that is closest to the human world and therefore affects it so greatly. Remote stars emanating weak light personify, according to the philosopher, a pure spiritual world. It is clear in this light why

Thoreau saw man's aspiration towards the stars, and the remarkable sensation engendered by the contemplation of the starry sky, as confirmations of his idea that man has the ability to comprehend the true link between the inner self and the universe. The identity of the fiery foundations of the microcosm and the macrocosm is proof of the existence of a transcendent reality, in which time and space, up and down are no more than an illusion and "the stars are the mountain peaks of celestial countries" (99, 7, 189).

Air as a first element of the world was not so amenable for use in symbolic-mythological constructions, its physical properties being not as tangible as those of earth, fire and water. But Thoreau insisted that air was an element closest to man, coming as it did into the lungs in breathing and filling man's whole body. "We touch objects—as the earth we stand on—but the soul—as the air we breathe... In the one case our surfaces meet, in the other our centres coincide" (75, 163).

Apart from wind, the presence of air is almost intangible to man. It is in this property of air that its transcendent significance is manifested. Air symbolises the very ability of the transcendent spirit to be present in man without signalling its presence by any sensation. Air is extremely volatile and weightless, but at the same time, as Thoreau stresses, it is passive, i.e., it requires a certain external source of motion—unlike fire. The mass of air is conceived by the philosopher as a vast ocean lying between man and the fiery stars, and linking them. Close contact

with this ocean brings man to the world of transcendent truths (see 40, 19). When air is set in motion, wind springs up; that is the beginning of the motion of transcendent truths in which man is bathed. "The truth shall prevail and falsehood discover itself, as long as the wind blows on the hills" (99, 7, 156).

Of course, such statements can be regarded as examples of symbolism of the first water. However, a different interpretation can also be given. Having identified certain properties of air and wind, Thoreau uses the artistic-philosophical method to transform these properties into concept-symbols designating such qualities as mobility, transparence, lightness, etc. The latter are then transferred to the states of the human inner self. However, this mediated path of philosophical analogies is naturally omitted, with only the "extreme" members of the chain of logical syllogisms retained: natural phenomenon—man. The omitted links in the chain of reasoning sink in the mist of vagueness, they become the domain of the artistic imagination, in short, they are loaded with "transcendent" meaning. In actual fact, there is nothing mystic about Thoreau's method—what we have here is symbolism gravitating towards realism and sensualism.

After air comes the fourth and last element of the world– water. It occupies a special place in the structure of Thoreau's world-view. The symbolism of the water element is the best elaborated and best studied aspect of Thoreau's philosophical-literary creativity. In most general form, he saw the flow of wa-

ter as similar to the movement of life. A network of rivers, streams, and waterfalls was, according to Thoreau, akin to the system of blood circulation in the human organism. Combined in a mountain stream were qualities that were extremely valuable in terms of transcendentalist symbolism: crystal purity, freshness, rapid flow (elusiveness), rhythm, vigour. Here, too, an obvious analogy was drawn between natural phenomena and man's psycho-physical states.

In the light of these interpretations it is clear why Thoreau insisted on the significance of reflections in water. "Anxious Nature," he asserted, "sometimes reflects from pools and puddles the objects which our grovelling senses may fail to see..." (99, 7, 139-140). By its very nature the human intellect is finite, while transcendent truths are infinite. As for ponds and lakes, they are ideal models of combination of the finite and the infinite: the fathomless depth of reflected heaven is one with the limited surface of the lake. That was why contemplation of ponds in forests was so desirable for man. "Floating in still water," Thoreau writes, "I too am a planet, and have my orbit in space, and am no longer a satellite of the earth" (75, 149).

Comparing the elements of the world, Thoreau aligned them in a kind of symbolic hierarchy: "Water is so much more fine and sensitive an element than earth. A single boatman passing up or down unavoidably shakes the whole of a wide river, and disturbs its every reflection. The air is an element which our voices shake still further than our oars the water" (99, 8, 71).

The hierarchic order of world elements is determined, to a significant extent, by the degree of sensitivity of the elements to external stimuli. Here, a new and obvious symbolic analogy arises: the susceptibility of a given element to external influences is symbolically identified with the sensitivity of the reactions of human consciousness to everything coming from the outside.

3. The Mythological Law of "Renewal"

Thoreau applied the symbolic method to his analysis of the spatio-temporal structure of the world, which helped him to discern abstract truths underlying ordinary objects and events. The basic premise for postulating space is for Thoreau the ideal point at which the consciousness of man experiencing the world is situated, while time is defined as the ideal moment, as momentaneousness, also relying on experiencing the surrounding world. Thoreau believed that it would not be the study but rather the experiencing of space and time in their physical objectiveness that would enable one to see the symbols leading to the comprehension of the transcendent world in which both space and time lose their significance.

Thoreau could provide only one answer to the question "where?": in that point of space at which the inner Self is. That moment-point can also be defined as the Self point. It is the centre of a landscape and of the scenery, and it is to this point and from this point that the rays of meaningfulness

flow in and out, the rays that make the whole of the surrounding world a symbolic reflection of the transcendent world (see 99, 7, 15).

All that is outside the range of the rays of meaningfulness loses significance for Thoreau, though not its physical being. The immersion in the experiencing of one's position in space ("here") is knowledge of space without its physical dimensions; it is a process of identification of a point ("here") with the entire continuum of points in space ("everywhere"). The truth—in the broadest sense—can be sought for at any point in space, for all space can be concentrated at each point.

Following his method of symbolic interpretation of the properties of the physical world, Thoreau imparted a metaphysical meaning to the characteristics of physical space, including the concepts of vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension, or "the line of the individual consciousness at any given intersection of time and space" (40, 18), has two poles, two extreme points. One of these is the earth, the basis of all that occurs in the physical world, the world of natural phenomena in the life of man considered in the physico-physiological (non-spiritual) aspect. The other pole or point is the point of the star. It symbolises the purpose of spiritual evolution, the world of pure intellectual being. The earth-stars vertical line is the principal metaphysical line of individual consciousness.

Upward movement signifies development. The entire life, or history, of nature and mankind is, Thoreau noted, an aspiration to take

up and consolidate a vertical position, and to get nearer the stars. These ideas of the philosopher show clearly the interweaving in his worldview of different ideological factors—mythological-religious and natural-scientific. In the spirit of Christianity, Thoreau looked towards the celestial spheres for the dominance of the ideal, of the absolute spirit. Under the impact of contemporary natural science, though, he studied the influence of the sun on the growth of plants and living organisms. Thoreau's views of the most important natural process, the process of growth, are infused with a quaint combination of these contradictory factors.

The horizontal dimension, and the forms of movement connected with it, carry a different symbolism. For Thoreau, horizontal movement is not movement as such- it is merely a change in the physical locus of existence unaccompanied by the emergence of a new positive quality. Man's individual development is accompanied by vertical growth, whereas the development of false forms of being—say, of commercial civilisation—primarily occurs on the horizontal plane. Civilisation spreads out without growing. A rootedness in the physical surface of the earth is evidence of lack of spirituality.

Just as a point in space was identified by Thoreau with the entire universe, so was the moment of experiencing identified with eternity. "Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places

and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages... The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions" (100, 70). What is essential for Thoreau is the given moment and absolute eternity, while the course of time itself loses its importance and transcendental significance. "We go about mending the time, when we should be building the eternity" (99, 7, 212). "Time is but the stream I go afishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper, fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars" (100, 71).

Thanks to such human capabilities as imagination, memory and vision, based on sensitive observation of the external world and states of consciousness, man focuses all the spatial and temporal characteristics of the world at one point. There exists only the moment of deep and genuine world perception, Thoreau believed, while all the rest was secondary, relative and hypothetical. That was why the imagination played such an important role in the assimilation of the world: "I am time and the world... In me are summer and winter, village life and commercial routine, pestilence and famine and refreshing breezes, joy and sadness, life and death" (99, 7, 349). Despite certain elements of subjectivism and agnosticism in Thoreau's worldview, he did not deduce the characteristics and phenomena of the external world from his consciousness. Thoreau searched

for analogies between the state of the material world and the states of the human spirit. The path of knowledge lies through the search for analogies to the perception of transcendent truths concealed behind symbols of nature. When this path has been traversed, a direct correspondence between soul and over-soul, between microcosm and macrocosm is established. The establishment of such a correspondence entails the elimination of space and time. "I cannot see the bottom of the sky," the philosopher exclaims, "because I cannot see to the bottom of myself..." (99, 7, 150). "The stars are the apexes of what wonderful triangles! What distant and different beings in the various mansions of the universe are contemplating the same one at the same moment!... Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant? We should live in all the ages of the world in an hour; ay, in all the worlds of the ages. History, Poetry, Mythology!—I know of no reading of another's experience so startling and informing as this would be" (100, 12). "While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless" (100, 191). "Our thoughts are the epochs of our life..." (99, 8, 43).

In Thoreau, the symbolism of physical phenomena and the dynamics of material processes merge in a unitary construct. However, Thoreau resorted to an unusual device to achieve a dynamism of the world picture inherent in all Romantics. Growth, birth, struggle, disintegration, death—all these natural processes occupied a most important

place in his worldview. Following his basic principle of congruence between the physical and the metaphysical worlds, between the domains of matter and spirit, the philosopher postulated a law that covered both these spheres of being; he called that law the law of rebirth, or of renewal.

Just as most of Thoreau's worldview constructs, this law was a quaint combination of mythology and naturalism. The philosopher tried to combine the dynamism of the organic processes of nature with the dynamism of changes in the states of human consciousness. A logical foundation of this synthesis was again the fundamental analogy between physical and spiritual processes which Thoreau consistently expanded to cover all being. The law of rebirth or renewal asserted the supremacy of unorganised forms of nature and spirit over strictly organised ones, the primacy of dynamics over statics, of inner structure over external form, of continuity over discreteness (see 24, 87). The world, both visible and concealed within man as spirit, was subject to rhythmical cycles of extinction and rebirth, which renew being. Man the carrier of the spiritual principle was subject, Thoreau believed, to the same cycles as organic nature. What he had in mind, though, was not identity of these cycles but their symbolic congruence. This symbolism permeates Thoreau's discourse on such phenomena of nature as the seasons, day and night (especially important for him were dawn and the morning), and finally the stages of the human life (birth—childhood—maturing—zenith—old age).

The myth of renewal or rebirth of nature, life and spirit dominated the structure of Thoreau's worldview, lending it the quality of dynamism. In the concluding chapter of Walden, this myth is outlined in brief symbolic form: "Everyone has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years; first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it... Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this?" (100, 221). The law of resurrection and renewal is also transfinite in regard of space and time—they are ignored in this law as inessential. According to Thoreau, time does not exist for transcendent reality; what does exist is duration measured by the pulsing of the cycles of extinction and renewal. The processes of rebirth or upward movement are accompanied by the strengthening of the spiritual principle and, reaching a peak, they are replaced by downward movement or emanation, the falling away of matter from spirit.

The introduction of dynamism in the philosophical picture of the world inevitably poses the problem of directedness of movement; in other words, the question of progress arises most acutely. Thoreau's statements on this issue are scant and not definite enough. There is nothing surprising about

this, for the problem of development was in general a stumbling block for the Romantic worldview. The fundamental contradiction of attempting to combine transcendentalism with natural science made it impossible for Thoreau to solve the problem of development. On the one hand, observation and study of the world of nature compelled him to accept the idea of progressive evolution of the species. On the other hand, because of his Transcendentalist convictions, the philosopher imposed limitations, in advance, on evolution, for lying above the world of living nature was, in any case, a world of transcendent meaning opposed to any movement forward. Thus the Romantic world picture, incorporating turbulent natural cataclysms, the growth of organic nature, etc., had an extremely metaphysical frame. The myth of rebirths and renewals proved to be merely an idealistically angled version of natural dynamism which allowed of development and progress only on the path leading to the domain of the transcendent spirit. The interpretation of growth as a desire to move upwards, to the spiritual element, set an apriori insurmountable limit to this growth.

The mythological concept of development permeated the whole of Thoreau's worldview, making it a cohesive system of interpretation of the phenomena of the external world and of man's consciousness. The potential semantic energy of symbols was made actual through their introduction into the context of the renewal myth. That completed the construction of the organic-dynamic and transcendental world picture.

CHAPTER IV

MAN ON THE PATH TO NATURE

There has probably been no school in the history of philosophy that did not try to formulate and solve, in one way or another, the problem of nature (What is nature? What are the principles of its structure? Wherein lies the source of its existence? How does it relate to man cognizing it?). Each epoch worked out its own historically determined picture of nature, its own "philosophical landscape".

This problem assumed special importance in the works of the Romantics at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Having grown out of a rejection of the Enlightenment mechanicism, and lost the faith in the ability of reason to establish a just order in society, European Romanticism was from the outset poisoned by the awareness of man's alienation from the political system. In turning to nature, the Romantic philosopher searched in it for something which society had refused him. Thus he discovered a new image of nature previously concealed from him—the image of an omnipotent, mysterious and God-inspired interlocutor and friend—but a fickle friend, one who easily becomes a cold and implacable

enemy. The world of nature emerged here in heretofore unknown colours of meaning, comprising something unusual and elevated, and at the same time promising salvation to the observer rejected by everyone including himself.

1. The Foundations of Romantic Naturalism

The theme of nature is the principal one in Thoreau's philosophical-literary oeuvre. A laconic definition of the American thinker's worldview would have to be expressed in the word "naturalism". True, it is impossible to restrict oneself to that word alone—it would have to be further concretised as Romantic, partly scientific, symbolic, transcendental and contemplative. This list could be further extended, and not a single of the characteristics listed above could be accepted without significant reservations. Just as any other complex phenomenon, Thoreau's philosophy can hardly be squeezed into any one single slot.

Thoreau's naturalism has certain unique distinctive features. The very perception of nature by the American philosopher is different from that of the European Romanticists. The infinite and majestic nature passionately worshipped by Novalis, Coleridge or Schelling was ideal (metaphysical or transcendent) nature. Even given the relatively virginal quality of the West European landscape in those days, it was delimited, discrete, and finite. The Romantics were tragically sensitive to all this. The borders of the dwarflike states, the

numerous waterways and roads seemed to crush and fragment the world of nature. The headlong pace of urbanisation and growth of industry, the encroachment of civilisation on forests, rivers and mountains—all of this taken together imparted a feeling of fatal division and doom hanging over the Romantic passion for nature. The nature of the European Romantics was the nature of the Thames banks, of the Versailles park, the Viennese forest and the Mediterranean coast. It would be hard to say if there was more nature or more civilisation about that landscape. It was only with the aid of their famous fertile imagination that philosophers and poets overcame the horizon of immediate sensuous givenness and immersed themselves in images of ideal nature—the product of the absolute spirit's unconscious creativity. But creation of an ideal world did not rid them of burning dissatisfaction with the real world, and their worshipping of nature suffered from the incurable disease of chronic pessimism.

The nature that surrounded Thoreau and served as the source of creative inspiration did not yet carry any traces of civilisation's active encroachment and appeared to him to be infinite and inexhaustible. The forests surrounding Concord flowed in a broad stream westwards, giving way to the prairies and then the ridges of the Rockies bordering on the Pacific coast. In those times, there were neither cities nor factories nor road networks nor even fields and farms in these vast territories.

The vastness of the sparsely populated areas was the reason why Emerson could

write (in a fairly Utopian spirit, of course): "But [man's] operations taken together are so insignificant ... that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result" (26,8). Following Emerson, Thoreau sang the glory of American nature, seeing it as the prototype of the noble and Romantic Mother Nature. Comparing North America and Western Europe, Thoreau wrote: "If the moon looks larger here than in Europe, probably the sun looks larger also. If the heavens of America appear infinitely higher, and the stars brighter, I trust that these facts are symbolical of the height to which the philosophy and poetry and religion of her inhabitants may one day soar" (99, 5, 222).

Thoreau attributed not only physical but also metaphysical meaning to the spaces of the American continent—a meaning that was easily explainable in the context of the symbolic worldview. "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World" (99, 5, 224). In speaking of the boundless spaces of the American West, Thoreau clearly realised, of course, its actual geographical confines, but the vastness of the country's territory was so impressive that it inspired a penchant towards idealisation. Unlike the European Romantics, Thoreau drew such a fine line between nature and Nature that it virtually vanished. The fact that Thoreau turned to pristine landscapes for inspiration was of decisive significance for his whole artistic-philosophical creativity. In the world

of nature, Thoreau found infinitely more than a mere living collection of biological entities. He saw the untouched nature of North America above all as an embodiment of the Romantic ideal. "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society" (99, 5, 205).

Thoreau's worldview is that of a naturalist and a Romantic. These two features or characteristics were the two opposite poles of his world perception between which a field of great ideational tension arose. Thoreau's position was characterised by continual fluctuations between realistic naturalism and Transcendentalism, reflecting the influence of Goethe and Emerson respectively.

The aphoristic fragment "Nature", until recently ascribed to Goethe,* could be an introduction into Thoreau's Romantic naturalism. Goethe's work elicited delighted response from Emerson and Thoreau—an indication of the affinity of views of the German poet and philosopher and those of the American Transcendentalists. Affinity does not mean identity, of course. Goethe's naturalist world perception drew a picture of all-embracing, mysterious, infinitely variable, eternally evolving, omnipotent and kindly nature. This vision of nature was close to Thoreau

* As became clear only recently, that fragment belongs to the English moralist A.A.C. Shaftesbury (see his *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*, London, John Toland, 1699).

(see 38, *18*, 85), but, as if to complete Goethe's pantheism verging on materialism, Thoreau endeavoured to introduce the ideas of symbolic Transcendentalism in the picture of the world. In this, he followed Emerson, who insisted on the existence of two opposite though conjoint spheres, nature and spirit. The spiritual was present in nature, filling it. The abundance of forms, processes, and combinations of phenomena did not have an independent significance, merely expressing nature's subordinate position with regard to the spirit, proving the fact that nature exists for the spirit: all empirical facts are symbols of that spirit, everything in the world, both nature and men, was subordinated to the over-soul, to reason (see 26, 7-23).

The views of both Goethe and Emerson appeared unsatisfactory to Thoreau. The philosophical solution of the problem of nature which he offered was a compromise. Just as the two philosophers mentioned here, he proceeded from the idea of nature's infiniteness and inexhaustibility, and its great importance for man. However, for Goethe, with his inclination towards pantheism, the mystery of nature was contained in nature itself. For Emerson the Transcendentalist the mystery of nature lay in its links with the spirit.* Thoreau's compromise position

* In the view of the Romantics, as Engels put it, "Sphinx-like nature ... has a question to put to every man and every age—happy is the man who answers it aright; he who does not answer it or answers wrongly, falls a prey to that part of the Sphinx which is brutish and ferocious..." (1, *3*, 449).

stems from his desire to combine the two viewpoints and to build on this synthesis a conception organically combining a recognition of both the materiality and ideality of the world. That was a programme, as it were, for the overcoming of the Romantic "two worlds" situation. In doing so, Thoreau tried to adhere faithfully to the philosophical method of Romanticism: he steered clear of any complete definitions of nature and, using the principle of mosaic narrative, scattered throughout his works separate statements, often very brief, on the various aspects of nature. Only a consideration of the totality of that philosophical mosaic can build an image-concept of nature in the reader's mind. Thoreau and the Romantics immersed the cognizing subject in nature, as it were, as a result of which the problem of nature was almost entirely transformed by them into the nature vs inner self problem.

Let us turn to *Walden*. From the very beginning of the chapter "Solitude", Thoreau develops the idea of complete union of man and nature: "I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself ... and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me" (100, 90-91). Despite the fact that Thoreau often writes of Nature with the capital N, i.e., of ideal nature, further narrative shows that the author has in mind real (physical) natural phenomena.

However, a directly opposite theme arises in the chapter "The Ponds". "Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her," states Thoreau. "The birds with their plumage

and their notes are in harmony with the flowers, but what youth or maiden conspires with the wild luxuriant beauty of Nature? She flourishes most alone, far from the towns where they reside. Talk of heaven! ye disgrace earth" (100, 137).

Using the aesthetic criterion of harmony, the philosopher pushes apart, as it were, man and Nature. According to Thoreau, morally imperfect men cannot enter the kingdom of nature. The moment people lose their spirituality, Nature immediately abandons them, becoming their enemy instead of friend, a cold physical body, the perfidious Sphinx.

In the chapter "The Pond in Winter", we find a description of a different quality of nature: "After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been endeavouring in vain to answer in my sleep, as what—how—when—where? But there was dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad windows with a serene and satisfied face, and no question on *her* lips. I awoke to an answered question, to Nature and daylight... Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask" (100, 189). This fragment treats of ideal Nature or, in other words, of nature lit by the presence of absolute truth: "The night veils without doubt a part of this glorious creation; but day comes to reveal to us this great work, which extends from earth even into the plains of the ether" (100, 189). In a symbolic context, the morning illumination of nature signifies the revelation of the mystery of ideal Nature and the

establishment of the ties between subject and transcendent spirit.

Who can see and perceive the presence of the spiritual substance? Thoreau does not restrict the circle of the initiated to wise men and poets only. As a Romantic philosopher, he also glorifies the inhabitants of the forests, lonely farmers, Indians and hunters, all those virtually unaffected by the corrupting influence of civilisation. "They never consult with books... The things which they practice are said not yet to be known... His life itself passes deeper in nature than the studies of the naturalist penetrate" (100, 190). Thus the truth of nature revealed itself either to the greatest and wisest of men or to naive minds untouched by civilisation. In this way Thoreau's cult of wisdom was combined with the cult of spontaneity and naiveté. Children and savages were equated with philosophers. The savage's pristine naiveté and simplicity is akin to the profundity of the wise man: dialectically speaking, extremes meet. The ideal spiritual principle in nature can be grasped both by a wise man and philosopher, and by the native inhabitant of virginal forests unassuming in his aspirations and wants, while the learned naturalist, a creation of civilisation with its eternal one-sidedness and intellectuality, remains outside the world of nature. Thoreau buttresses this idea by criticism of science in the spirit of Rousseau. But later, as if enjoying his own paradoxes, Thoreau goes off on a delighted exploration of the physico-geographical and natural characteristics of the lake. Science, demoted a few moments ago to the

level of a game for urban dwellers, regains its importance. Detailed and precise data are provided on the level of water and the size of the lake, the animals inhabiting its depths, etc. There is an explanation for such a device. The philosopher asks himself a question, as it were: can a maximally precise naturalist approach to a physical-natural phenomenon help to grasp its ideal essence? For Thoreau, this question is definitely rhetorical, and the answer to it definitely negative. Therefore this naturalist digression ends in the following conclusion: "If we know all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at the point" (100, 194).

In evolving their conception of nature, scientists restrict themselves to sensuous data only, to experiments and observations, which are not enough to grasp the universal cohesion and harmony of nature, the unitary laws of all its parts. "Even when cleft or bored through it [nature] is not comprehended in its entireness" (100, 194). At the time of writing *Walden* Thoreau insisted, as we see, that scientific naturalism could supply knowledge of nature only if it was guided by the knowledge of transcendental laws. Thoreau did not reject scientific naturalism, but in his view it was only possible after an intuitive interpretation of nature, not before it.

In the chapter 'Higer Laws" Thoreau concentrated on quite a different aspect of nature and man's relation to it. Before that, he spoke of the presence of the ideal trans-

cendent element in physical nature. That required, in Thoreau's view, a careful and attentive handling of nature. And now he posited an apparently unexpected thesis: "Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome" (100, 150). At first sight, this slogan appears to be alien to Thoreau's philosophy, as he mostly advocated fusion with nature rather than victory over it. True, this impression of paradoxicality soon disappears. "I found in myself, and still find," wrote Thoreau, "an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both" (100, 143). Thus Thoreau recognised two equally strong instincts: one toward the ideal and another toward the real or savage. The spiritual element filling nature reveals itself both in the harmonious beauty of the landscape and in the untamed raging of the dynamic forces where man has never set foot. That was why Thoreau often used the word "savage" next to the word "beautiful". The great creative spirit, the Romantic believed, could be discovered both in the harmony of nature and in its natural chaos. A high aesthetic emotion was close to the instinct toward the savage element.

Thoreau held the law of the growth of the spiritual element (rebirth or renewal) as the universal principle (or highest law) of the motion of being. Everything that facilitated such growth was consonant with the law of nature; everything that impeded it had to be eliminated or overcome. Neither physiological needs nor instincts, nor the subcon-

scious were essentially bad. The question was, toward what did they drive the individual? Say, food is a necessary condition of man's life and spiritual activity. The nature of the process of eating is, of course, physiological. But Thoreau decisively condemned excessive passion for food, as he did all the other excesses in human nature. His general conclusion was that the animal in us "awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers" (100, 148). "Yet the spirit can for the time pervade and control every member and function of the body, and translate what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion" (100, 149). It is not nature but inert matter ("sensuality") devoid of transcendental spirituality that must be overcome—such was Thoreau's conclusion, somewhat reminiscent of the moral-philosophical arguments of the neo-Platonics.

The search for the essence of nature proved agonising for Thoreau. Endeavouring to grasp it in all its fullness and diversity, the philosopher now came closer to it, now moved away from it. And yet his perception of nature gradually took distinct shape.

2. Man—Nature—The Absolute: The Correspondence Principle

Thoreau's worldview is Romantic; for him, nature is the living Universal, subject to the laws of growth of an organic system. The Romantics' entire theoretical and artistic activity was permeated by a desire to move

ever closer to that living organic Universal.

Along with the concept of organic unity, a Romantic's worldview includes that of alienation and disunity: "all [subjects] are *isolates* who must construct imaginative lives for themselves" (72, 79). With Romantics, isolation became a universal principle of being. In their view, man was alienated from other men, from nature, and from his own past.

An important feature of the Romantic world perception is a desire to avoid demonstrating the final results of their reasoning. Romanticism lays special stress on the cognition of the world through the cognition of self, on the process of working out judgments and ideational structures. The truth lies in the search and not in a fixed result, for, strictly speaking, there can be no fixed results at all.

The merging of these three elements of the worldview (aspiration towards an ideal, realisation of man's alienation from external being, and dynamic unfolding of the process of self-cognition) shaped the principal theme of the philosophy and literature of European Romanticism: a reflective description of the process of isolation and alienation of the subjective Self, combined with a covert and at times overt desire to move closer to the Universal and be identified with it. Here the principal internal contradiction of Transcendentalism is laid bare—the incompatibility of the extravert and introvert tendencies, interpreted not only, and not so much, psychologically as on a more general philosophical plane. Emotionalising

over this contradiction was a characteristic feature of the later Romantics' literary-philosophical activity. In the course of time, though, theories emerged in Romanticism itself which aimed at overcoming this contradiction. An attempt to solve this task was undertaken by Schelling.

In his *Naturphilosophie*, the German philosopher worked out a theory of nature as the evolution of intelligence or spirit, which is present in nature without realising itself. The ideal could only be attained, according to Schelling, through combining the conscious spirit (man) and the unconscious (nature). Men not only needed nature—they also had to make up their minds to establish close contacts with it. In referring to the links between man and nature, Schelling had in mind two aspects of this relation. Firstly, man is drawn into the system of nature in virtue of his spiritual involvement with it. Secondly, the realisation of this involvement requires a conscious and intimate-subjective aspiration toward the world of nature. In other words, the panlogical law is actualised through the realisation by the individual of the necessity of his links with living nature. The second aspect of the problem leads directly to the problem of nature—the central theme of the philosopher's work (see 11a, 24-25). Only a free spirit can understand and love nature. An enslaved mind will see nothing in nature but matter, the source of moral evil.

Emerson, who made a direct impact on Thoreau, developed a somewhat modified version of Romantic naturalism. Compared

to Schelling's theory, Emerson's romanticism was somewhat more naturalistic. In Emerson's philosophy, man's link with nature was given the special designation of "correspondence". That transcendentalist concept was interpreted by Emerson fairly broadly, as a substantial link between the state of the mind and external phenomena which create, in their totality, the vast world of "verbless language". Recognising the "secondary" character of the natural landscape compared to transcendent reality, Emerson saw the world of nature as the domain which can and must enlighten and ennoble man, charging him with ethical and aesthetic spirituality, for man himself, according to Emerson, was a pitiful sight, being a symbol of the divine principle in the state of degradation ("man is God in ruins"). This state of the civilised man makes it highly difficult for him to reveal the divine spirit in his nature; it is much easier to find it in external nature—the source of purification and renovation. Wishing to preserve the remains of the degenerating spiritual principle, man is compelled to concentrate his efforts on the reading, decoding and experiencing the divine cryptography of nature manifested in all the phenomena untouched by civilisation. Interestingly, Baudelaire created a precise image of "correspondence" independently of Emerson:

Correspondences

In Nature's temple living pillars rise,
And words are murmured none have understood,
And man must wander through a tangled wood
Of symbols watching him with friendly eyes.

As long-drawn echoes heard far-off and dim
Mingle to one deep sound and fade away;
Vast as the night and brilliant as the day,
Colour and sound and perfume speak to him.

Some perfumes are as fragrant as a child,
Sweet as the sound of hautboys, meadow-green;
Others, corrupted, rich, exultant, wild,

Have all the expansion of things infinite:
As amber, incense, musk, and benzoin,
Which sing the sense's and the soul's delight.

(Baudelaire: His Prose and Poetry. Ed. by T.R. Smith. New York, 1919, p. 149).

Correspondence did not imply either scientific study or transformation of nature—nothing but excursions, i.e., fairly short-lived and spontaneous acts of immersion in the contemplation of nature. As man is immersed in an emotional experiencing of the landscape, the divine principle in his soul is revived, and simultaneously the entire surrounding world is renewed. However, underlying idealistic naturalism is, we sense, an essentially justifiable and just desire to open to man a rich world of living nature, to see it as a source of joyous optimism. Emerson's philosophical position, inspired with the desire to place man in the "original relation to the universe" (26, 7) reflected some deep processes of re-assessment of spiritual values. Emerson's position was contradictory. On the one hand, the philosopher called for the study and assimilation of nature, in order to learn to understand its concealed meaning. On the other hand, nature as such does not, in his view, have any significance or deserve trust (see 72, 31).

The first edition of Emerson's *Nature*

had this epigraph from Plotinus: "Nature is but an image or imitation of Wisdom, the last of the soul, nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know" (26, 3). In fact, Transcendental Romanticism called for a return to nature only to demonstrate the subordination of nature to the absolute spirit and in the final analysis to effect a complete spiritualisation of the material world. In the God—nature—man system, or rather the Absolute Soul—Nature—Man system, the middle term, "nature", played a merely passive function. Strictly speaking, correspondence with the absolute is possible without nature, Emerson believed. This brings him to the logical conclusion: "Not in nature but in man is all the beauty and worth he sees. The world is very empty, and is indebted to this gilding, exalting soul for all its pride" (26, 86).

At the starting point of his philosophical-naturalist reasoning, Emerson aimed at proving the harmony of the world elucidating the place of man in the kingdom of living nature. At the end of his philosophical search, though, he came to a paradox: nature is secondary, it is alien to man; the universe is permeated with spiritual harmony only. In Emerson, nature was devoid of its substantial value.

Underlying Emerson's contradictory attitude to nature is the more fundamental contradiction of Romantic naturalism as a whole.

In trying to solve the problem of the relation between man and nature, Romanticism imparts, from the outset, ideal-transcendent qualities to the natural World. Rejecting the very possibility of the presence of the

ideal in contemporary society, the Romantic seeks, figuratively speaking, for the domain of being where that ideal could be placed. That domain is found in nature. In pre-Protestant Christianity, man's link with God, or the Absolute, was believed to be mediated by the church, while Protestantism recognised the possibility of man's direct communion with God. The Transcendentalists substantiated the doctrine of divine grace in their treatment of the relation between nature and man. In this treatment, though, the status of nature was questioned. The Romantic lays stress on the transcendental meaning of nature which is said to be fused with the latter. Although the material being of nature is implied, it is shifted into the background—and very far into the background, at that. In a forest or, say, on a river bank, he will concentrate not on the surrounding landscape but on his subjective experience bearing on the various states of the external natural world, raising that experience to an absolute and lending it a symbolic meaning. The Romantic senses the presence of an ideal behind each phenomenon of nature.

However, this path, chosen by Emerson, actually led to the loss of the living sensation of nature. Material being acquired a purely negative value. Moreover, that being began to function among the Romantics as the principal obstacle on the path of comprehending the absolute. That was why many Romantics eliminated, at a certain stage in their creative evolution, the mediating instance between man and the absolute.

Thoreau lived exactly at a time of an up-

surge of American Romanticism—turbulent but short-lived. However, Thoreau's adherence to Romanticism did not blind him to the weaknesses of Emerson's views; in endeavouring to overcome these weaknesses, Thoreau developed further the Romantic naturalist view of nature.

In his opinion, the being of nature was based on the processes of rebirth or renewal, interpreted almost exclusively as transcendental spiritual phenomena—true, with certain analogies in the material world. However, the doctrine of rebirth implied certain aspects of philosophical activity that went beyond the confines of Emersonian theory. The Walden experiment, which brought Thoreau fame, consisted, as we know, in a demonstrative escape from society into solitude in a forest cabin. That act represented an instance of rebirth or renewal of the thinker's inner Self. Thus Thoreau, in outright contravention of Emerson's ideas, demanded not only spiritual alienation from social life and immersion in contemplation of nature but also practical activity that would accord with philosophical ideas. The experiment had to show that nature, with which Thoreau desired to be in communion, had not only a subjective transcendental but also a concrete material meaning. Thoreau's entire philosophical-practical position bore evidence of his attention to material natural experience, to actions and acts.

Just as Emerson, Thoreau saw nature as a mystery which man had to unravel. But they had different conception of the mysteriousness of nature. Rather like Goethe,

Thoreau placed the mystery of nature in natural being itself. For him, ideal being and material being merged, as it were, in nature, whereas for Emerson mystery lay outside nature, in the world of concealed ideals underlying natural phenomena. As a result, Thoreau refused to place man above nature—as opposed to Emerson. Thoreau sought for partnership in material nature. Unlike Emerson, he interpreted man's cognitive relation to nature not as subordination of nature to man but as man's involvement in the world of nature, man's merging with it in thoughts and affairs. In Thoreau's interpretation, nature acquired a self-sufficient living existence. In Emerson's theory, that element was greatly weakened.

Correspondence itself acquired a different meaning, too; to be more precise, Thoreau greatly restricted the applicability of that principle. Immersion in the study of the facts of nature pushed into the background their correspondence with moral ideals. The pictures of real material nature drawn by Thoreau were so striking and convincing that the rare attempts to introduce "correspondence" in that context ceased to be either significant or demonstrative. The intonation itself of Thoreau's argument became hypothetical rather than assertive. Using his symbolic method, Thoreau raised the narrative to a philosophical level without resorting to correspondence analogies. A rare example of an obvious correspondence is to be found in *Walden* (the chapter "The Pond in Winter"). Thoreau's scientifically thorough study of Walden ends with this conclusion: "What I have

observed of the pond is no less true in ethics. It is the law of average" (100, 194). The philosopher then attempts an analogy between the pond's natural life and the life of the human spirit. In *Walden*, however, unlike Emerson's *Nature*, these correspondences were watered down, as if their author himself doubted their substance. Thoreau's absorption with the naturalist aspects of the world divested the symbol of Emersonian speculative trappings.

Yet Thoreau was a symbolist who lost his way among the contradictions of Romantic naturalism. Seeing that the conflict between the material and the ideal was unavoidable, Thoreau alternately took up one of the two opposed positions: (1) nature had to be overcome, (2) one could never have enough of nature. The compromise in Thoreau's philosophical positions is most clearly revealed in the following ideas:

—man needs nature for spiritual renovation and for preserving his sense of vitality;

—man is the highest creation of nature, he represents nature's interests. Man as a rational being reveals the meaning of nature that gave him life;

—nature vis-à-vis man is an omnipotent and mysterious force and not a projection of the non-Self onto the external world;

—the world of nature remains silent and useless until man has penetrated the essence of nature. It is only then that it becomes its interlocutor and helper. Thoreau believed that man could grasp nature only through inspired sensuous experiences full of creative zeal. One could only get closer to nature by

fully sensing it and becoming part of it. It followed that man turning to nature faced the task of educating his senses, of making them keen and noble enough to perceive the landscape. Thoreau's sensualism is thus characteristically concentrated on experiencing and sensing nature. We learn from his *Journals* that, to attain a maximal, if temporary, fusion with nature, to immerse himself in its world, the philosopher spent hours motionlessly standing in a forest thicket or on a river bank;

—getting closer to nature means getting closer to the spiritual element; the path towards the highest ideal lies through the raising of the ideal in the individual, and that is achieved through the merging of man and nature;

—the dominant factor of man's ideological evolution is the urge toward achieving a sense of the fullness of life. This attitude to the world is attained through a real and joyous relationship with nature.

Thoreau's critical and at the same time careful interpretation of Emerson's ideas eventually led him to shift the focus of his worldview to nature. Using Emerson's correspondence principle, Thoreau discovered in nature something more generalised than lay open to direct contemplation. But Emerson's transcendentalism led Thoreau away from the living perception of nature, making it a kind of lifeless temple of forms and symbols in which there was no room for the natural scientist. Besides, Emerson sowed the seeds of doubt about the objective and self-contained being of nature, and that ran counter

to Thoreau's inherently worshipful attitude to natural being.

Partly changing and partly developing further the Romantic Transcendentalist programme, Thoreau set himself a dual task: (a) living a rich and intense natural life; (b) living just as intense and rich spiritual life (see 72, 37).

Thoreau's views thus present a compromise. An eyewitness and participant of the rise and rapid growth of American Romanticism, Thoreau was also sensitive to the degradation of the Transcendental Romantic ideology that soon set in. That was why his ideological quest led him to attempt a reconciliation between Romanticism that lost more and more ground, and naturalism that gained in philosophical strength. The reconciliation was not, in fact, achieved, and neither was it possible.

3. The Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Experiencing of the Landscape

The concept of transcendental correspondence demanded explication of the problem of aesthetic and ethical aspects of the interaction between man and nature. During philosophical debate on this problem, interesting issues arose which have not lost their significance for modern science.

In his essay "Slavery in Massachusetts" Thoreau touched on the problem of nature, too. After tearing down certain spiritual values of contemporary society, the author appealed, somewhat unexpectedly, to the reader: "I walk toward one of our ponds;

but what signifies the beauty of nature when men are base? We walk to lakes to see our serenity reflected in them; when we are not serene, we go not to them. Who can be serene in a country where both the rulers and the ruled are without principle? The remembrance of my country spoils my walk...

"But it chanced the other day that I scented a white waterlily, and a season I had waited for had arrived. It is the emblem of purity. It bursts up so pure and fair to the eye, and so sweet to the scent, as if to show us what purity and sweetness reside in, and can be extracted from, the slime and muck of earth... What confirmation of our hopes is in the fragrance of this flower! I shall not so soon despair of the world for it, notwithstanding slavery, and the cowardice and want of principle of Northern men. It suggests what kind of laws have prevailed longest and widest, and still prevail, and that the time may come when man's deeds will smell as sweet. Such is the odor which the plant emits. If Nature can compound this fragrance still annually, I shall believe her still young and full of vigor, her integrity and genius unimpaired, and that there is virtue even in man, too, who is fitted to perceive and love it...

"Slavery and servility have produced no sweet-scented flower annually, to charm the senses of men, for they have no real life: they are merely a decaying and a death, offensive to all healthy nostrils. We do not complain that they *live*, but that they do not *get buried*. Let the living bury them; even they are good for manure" (99, 4, 407, 408).

This fragment reveals the principles of Tho-

reau's approach to the relationship between nature and morality. Two semantic series are present in the text: a series of natural phenomena and a series of social phenomena. To each of them the aesthetic criterion of harmony is applicable, i.e., the criterion of correspondence between inner content and external form of the phenomenon in question, which Thoreau believed to be the most important and perhaps the only significant demand imposed on reality. Beauty, commensurability, completeness of the semantic principle, given at the same time the entire incompleteness of the perspective of evolution—those were the principal elements posed by the philosopher as the standard of harmony. It is therefore not surprising that, just as the other Romantics, Thoreau raised the music of nature to an absolute, seeing it as the transcendent prototype of any harmony and even, to some extent, the very substance of that harmony.* "Nature makes no noise. The howling storm, the rustling leaf, the pattering rain are no disturbance, there is an essential and unexplored harmony in them. Why is it that thought flows with so deep and sparkling a current when the sound of distant music strikes the ear?" (99, *8*, 12). Harmony is inherent in man, too. It rests in an aestheti-

* Let us note that one of the most important themes in Thoreau's works is that of symbolic meaning of sounds, analysis of the melody of natural rhythms, the music of celestial spheres, of silence, distant melody, etc. These concept-symbols abound in the philosopher's journals and treatises—in such chapters of *Walden* as "Sounds", "Higher Laws", and "Conclusion", and in his early essay "Sound and Silence" (1838) (see 99, 7, 64-69).

cally commensurate relationship of spiritual and material factors—the relationship between thought or intention on the one hand and deed on the other. Finally, harmony is rooted in the relationship between man and society, but the plight of that type of harmony, in Thoreau's view, is now very sad. The question arises, however, of the relationship between natural and social harmony. Here the two semantic series merge into one, and a third one emerges.

Due to the principle of harmony, a one-to-one relation is established between natural and social phenomena. Subject to the common measuring-rod of harmony, they are united in a transcendent correspondence. Thus the waterlily symbolises a morally perfect person. To be more precise, the harmony of the waterlily and surrounding nature is compared with the harmony (if it were possible) between man and his social environment. The third series, it appears, covers the sphere of the transcendent symbol, the transfinite, extrasensuous essences. Here, Thoreau's philosophy is distinctly tinged with Platonic motifs. He analyses the hierarchic structure comprising society (man), nature, and the world of ideal transcendent essences (the absolute). Immersed in sensuous perception and intuitive comprehension of the symbolic meaning of nature, man establishes a link with the absolute. Harmony becomes not only the core but also an essential feature of transcendent correspondence. The experiencing and decoding of the symbolic context of the landscape leads man to the first elements and to the element of the ul-

timate end, that is to say, in both cases to the absolute, or the over-soul. Thus one link in the chain of correspondence ("man—nature") actually assumes the stature of the universal substantial man—nature—absolute relation. The middle link in this chain (nature) performs a highly important function in Thoreau's worldview. Unlike the neo-Platonics, who regarded matter, or nature, as the last instance of the emanation of the spirit, Thoreau saw the emanation of the one as passing through nature to man, so that the society of men rather than nature became the extreme point or the *anti*-absolute. In nature, Thoreau believed, the ideal harmoniously filled the material without merging with it. Nature was therefore blameless vis-à-vis the absolute. Guilt lay in the perversion of the spiritual rather than in the absence of a union with the spiritual. Under the influence of social evil accumulated in the forms of social communal living, man distorts the harmonious principle. Nature has no choice, whereas man does have it. But society has already made its choice, and man found himself between two poles—nature (linked to the absolute) and non-spiritual forms of social being. A person can only get close to the spiritual by abandoning the social and uniting with the natural.

Thoreau's worldview was thus infused with an aesthetic world perception. The beautiful proved to be a most important criterion of the truth. However, bearing in mind the closeness of Thoreau's views to the philosophical ideas of Plato and Schelling, it is reasonable to assume that, apart from the aesthetic aspect, absolute harmony also has an

ethical aspect. And that will be a correct assumption. In the Romantic idea of harmony, the ethical is equated with the aesthetic, and both these elements are absorbed by the idea of good, or the absolute spirit.

However, the introduction of the moral-harmony principle in the broad context of being ("Our whole life is startlingly moral," wrote Thoreau (100, 148)) gives rise to several theoretical difficulties. One of these has to do with ethical-aesthetic interpretation of the "gloomy" aspects of nature. If the harmony of man has the harmony of nature for its prototype, how is one to understand natural phenomena which are traditionally seen as morally negative—such as the struggle between individuals, the death and destruction of life in some beings and the avid unquenchable desire for life in others? How are we to understand "night" and the "nocturnal" aspects of nature?

If they are seen as having negative meaning, harmony is destroyed. If the dark elements in nature stand in relations of correspondence with the dark elements in man and society, ascent to the absolute through nature loses its philosophical meaning. In the face of this contradiction Thoreau decides to justify the darker aspects of nature. "I seldom opened my door on a winter evening without hearing it [an owl]; *Hoo hoo hoo, hoorer hoo*... It was one of the most thrilling discords I ever heard. And yet, if you had a discriminating ear, there were in it the elements of a concord such as these plains never saw nor heard" (100, 182). What harmony did Thoreau have in mind? Again he turned to the

symbol of nature's nocturnal forces, to the image of the owl: "Wise midnight hags!... They give me a new sense of the variety and capacity of that nature which is our common dwelling" (100, 88). In Thoreau's view, full harmony reigns in nature, even if it does not at first sight correspond to our notions of good and evil, beauty and ugliness. The human mind has absorbed only part of the harmonious structure of nature, imparting a negative significance to the part that has not been cognized. By force of inertia and misconception, that unknown part of nature was identified with evil in man and society. Everything in nature, though, is consonant with laws, everything is true, beautiful and moral. Nature does not commit crimes against the spirit. Even death does not violate its unity and beauty.

The world of nature is virtuous—that is Thoreau's principal conclusion. That world is beautiful and morally perfect. Man alone introduces vices and ugliness in it, through his presence and activity. As for the "correspondence" to moral evil, it is, in fact, absent. Correspondence only occurs along a spiritually and morally ascending line. Thoreau would therefore never accept Baudelaire's image of "the flowers of evil". For Thoreau, flowers were a symbol of the good. Untouched, wild, pristine nature was for him a criterion of harmony. Just as Goethe, he believed that nature was always right.

In man and society, the fundamental unity of the ethical and the aesthetic is both violated and consolidated by the forms of social consciousness and the activity of social in-

stitutions. That was why the individual's rebirth, the attainment of the unity of the moral and the aesthetic in the perception of the world, is only possible through a process of self-improvement, of which the most important factor is contemplative assimilation of nature.

In Thoreau's view, nature carrying within itself an ideal has a greater fullness of life than man and society: "Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness,—to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features... We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander" (100, 24). Vigour of the spirit and moral optimism are synonyms. Unable to find his ideal in society, man turns to nature, for moral development, or self-improvement; he requires the presence of an ideal to which one can and must aspire, an ideal that is somewhere ahead and above. Nature's untamed wild might shows man that there are forces sur-

passing his own, that there is life flowering independently of him. Revealing in this way its moral-practical meaning, "correspondence" in the Transcendentalist sense drives man towards nature and points out to him the source of optimistic faith in the future. Contemplating overflowing vitality, man is ennobled by the influence of the hidden ideal principle, coming closer to the absolute.

Thoreau's moral-aesthetic approach to nature contains important philosophical ideas:

—nature is not only an external objective reality but also a source of moral-aesthetic experiences;

—nature requires an attentive and even worshipful attitude; violation of its harmony has a pernicious effect on human morality;

—nature permits of contemplative assimilation only; man must neither subordinate nor change nature but merely infiltrate its system cautiously, becoming a silent and thoughtful observer of its harmonious structure.

These conclusions from Thoreau's philosophical-naturalist views, contained, despite their Transcendentalist idealist nature, embryos of ideas that became popular in the 20th century. Thoreau raised and formulated, in fact, the highly complex problem of moral interaction between man and nature.

It should be said in all fairness that a contemporary of the American philosopher came very close to the same theme. We refer here to Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), the outstanding German naturalist, author of a vast number of scientific works, many of which laid the theoretical foundations of var-

ious natural sciences. Alexander von Humboldt's philosophical views have been studied by numerous researchers. Of special interest for the present inquiry is his small book *Pictures of Nature (Ansichten der Natur*, see 50). Characteristically, in this work devoted to physical geography, Humboldt touched on ethical problems. A major authority on science, Humboldt did not separate the ethical aspects of cognition of nature from the purely physical ones: "Everything that goes to shape the character of a landscape—the outline of the mountains that limit the horizon in the misty distance, the darkness of the firtree woods, the forest stream that rages between overhanging cliffs—all this stands in age-old mysterious relations with the life of man's soul" (50, 180).

The scientific picture of the world is created, in Humboldt's view, through emotional and intellectual assimilation of natural objects, so that a general theory must carry not only concepts and a system of concepts but also aesthetic emotions. The *Pictures of Nature* are an attempt at applying this principle. Humboldt says that tropical plants grown in hothouses do not adequately represent the flora of the hot climatic zone, observing in this connection: "And yet our expressive language, the poet's fiery imagination and the painter's art of portrayal provide a rich source of filling in the gaps. It is on this source that our imagination draws for living pictures of nature. In the cold north or naked desert a lonely man can get to know everything that has been studied in the most remote parts of the globe. In this way he can

create an inner world of his own—as free and eternal as the reason that gave rise to it" (50, 211). Humboldt did not set himself the task of revealing the essence of the age-old mysterious relation between man and landscape (or correspondence in the sense of Emerson and Thoreau) but, in keeping with the Romantic state of the mind, he pointed to its existence. Landscape penetrated into the deepest secret recesses of man's moral-aesthetical world, filling them with the light of beauty and nobility. As a result, the "influence of the physical world on the moral one, the mysterious mutual penetration of the sensuous and the extra-sensuous lends them study of nature—if one approaches this study from the higher standpoint—special charm so far little appreciated" (50, 169). Humboldt and Thoreau, quite independently of one another, came to similar conclusions: contemplation of landscapes affects the morality of the subject contemplating them. The German naturalist referred to the link between man and nature as mysterious interpenetration. Emerson introduced a special term, "correspondence", which he gave an objective-idealist and Transcendentalist colouring. In his turn, Thoreau took up an intermediate position, so to speak: rejecting Emerson's obvious spiritualism, he did not go as far as Humboldt in his recognition of the role of natural-scientific materialism. True, what is important here is the general result at which all three philosophers arrived, and which is problematised as follows: does contemplation and experiencing of pictures of nature make man morally better?

The search for an answer to this question did not cease after the disappearance of classical Romanticism either. In later times the idea of nature's influence on morality was expressed by widely differing thinkers, while the present-day ecological situation has lent it special significance.

Prominent Soviet philosophers, writers and educationalists also turned to this idea. Thus V.A. Sukhomlinsky gave pride of place to "education through nature": "We tell children that man became separated off from the animal world and became a gifted being ... because he saw the depth of the blue skies, the twinkling of the stars, the pink flood of sunset and sunrise... Man became man when he heard the whispering of the leaves and the grasshopper's song... he heard the marvellous music of life, and has been listening to it for hundreds and thousands of years" (98, 157). Sukhomlinsky did not regard nature as a self-sufficient factor but as one of the most essential components of the general aesthetical background surrounding man in his creative activity. The aesthetical environment, above all the natural environment, rouses the feeling of joy and a desire for vigorous activity. "Beauty does not by itself contain any magical force that would develop man's nobler spiritual feelings. Beauty only develops moral purity and humanity when labour creating beauty is humanised by high moral motives, above all when it is infused with respect for man" (98, 163).

At the same time Sukhomlinsky believed that the development of the individual, both philogenetic and ontogenetic, was de-

termined not only by labour activity but also by the realisation of the harmonious system of the surrounding world. The formation of aesthetic taste and ideal was intrinsically connected, Sukhomlinsky believed, with aesthetic education. The ethical and the aesthetic were, in his view, phenomena of the same order mutually conditioning one another. "Through the beautiful to the human," that was the fundamental proposition of Sukhomlinsky's theory of aesthetic education. In his opinion, aesthetic assimilation of the landscape implied a harmonious unity of contemplation, appreciation and practical activity. The moral significance of nature was not manifested, according to Sukhomlinsky, in man merely assimilating its beauty but in the motives by which he was guided, in the goals he set for himself, and finally in the kind of practical steps he took to preserve and magnify the beauty of nature. Sukhomlinsky considered all these aspects in their unity.

Individual contemplation of nature was the only way in which the Romantics could absorb its beauty. Sukhomlinsky also recognised the importance of the contemplative-emotional experience of assimilation of nature. But he laid even greater stress on practical conservation of nature's wealth—a process in which nature affected morality. Morality was, in Sukhomlinsky's view, a purely social phenomenon, it could not emanate from nature, as Thoreau and the Romantics believed, although there was no doubt that nature exerted a great influence on man.

The movement towards the beautiful

and noble is absolutely inconceivable without humanist collectivism, without the unity of emotional experience and social practical activity.

Even when man was left alone face to face with nature, as Robinson Crusoe on his desert island or Thoreau in his forest cabin, he never acts as an isolated spiritual monad. Man always carries within himself an "ensemble of all social relations". Therefore even the most intimate communion with nature is a social phenomenon. In any situation man acts on behalf of his society, and thus as its representative plenipotentiary. However, an individual intent on the autonomy of aesthetic and ethical consciousness will insist on his communion with nature being his private affair said to be independent of all that is external. That is what creates the illusion of direct relations between man and nature in the sphere of spiritual processes.

Despite its illusory character, individual communion with nature is not a mere phantom, though. It does exist, and it develops in close union with the social experiences of assimilation of nature.

First of all, nature appears to the individual observer as an object of aesthetic delight. He likes a certain landscape, pristine or man-made—if the latter harmonises with the natural environment. The view of nature in terms of its aesthetic value is a complex philosophical problem that has an age-long history. The main question here is to what extent the beauty of nature can be seen as objective, i.e., existing outside and independently of man: could it be that it is a projection of the

purely social ideals of beauty onto natural objects and a corresponding value set on these objects.

The aesthetic need guides individual aesthetic consciousness, turned to nature, towards spiritual assimilation of the landscape, towards the search for the latent and visible harmony of its constituent elements. Owing to the need to see, perceive and experience the beauty of the world, the individual enters into an aesthetic interaction with nature. Interestingly, an aesthetic need does not envisage any goals of the purely practical employment of the object, which leads as a rule to its destruction or radical transformation. A beautiful natural object is beautiful regardless of anything that can be made out of it. Moreover, a utilitarian attitude towards nature, taken to the point of neglect for anything without utilitarian value, destroys the aesthetic. That does not mean, however, that the aesthetic is only combined with the contemplative. Reasonable and thoughtful mastering of nature, and creation of its new forms by man, is also aesthetic if it does not contravene ecological principles. Thus a field of ripening wheat is no less aesthetically attractive than an absolutely untouched landscape. We must stress yet again, though, that an aesthetic need implies a spiritual assimilation of a natural landscape, its "spiritual consumption" in the form in which it exists. This need, deeply rooted in man, is satisfied during the course of living contemplative communion between man and nature. Such communion guides the individual, set in a natural environment, towards an

active aesthetic experience capable of becoming the basis of artistic inspiration and a kind of natural-aesthetic catharsis. But the aesthetic aspect of nature is fully revealed only in aesthetic activity.

Aesthetic activity goes beyond the limits of direct interpersonal communication, expressing the subject's orientation not towards other subjects but towards a certain object—either living nature or a work of art. This in turn entails the experiencing of aesthetic activity directed at natural objects. Thus the desire to discover and preserve a corner of virginal nature, to guard it against destruction, gives man great pleasure and contentment of purely aesthetic nature; activity becomes here a source of aesthetic enjoyment. In this kind of activity (involving subject and natural object), aesthetic values are essentially of the same origin as the values emerging in interpersonal communication. One must not, though, equate these two sources of aesthetic values—society and nature, as there is a fundamental difference between them, which Thoreau could not or would not take into account. He consistently combined the aesthetic value of man's relation toward nature with the aesthetic value of relations among men. This approach enabled him to endow the world of pristine nature with direct moral sense transcendent in relation to society.

But the subject's activity directed at natural objects rather than at communication with other subjects cannot have self-sufficient aesthetic value. In any of its forms and manifestations nature is always a mirror of the social, provided, of course, it lies with-

in the field of man's perception. Thus the aesthetic value of nature in its individual-personal aspect cannot be directly transformed into ethical values. This process is inevitably mediated by social experience. The beauty of nature, its harmony, infinity and virginity acquire a moral content only to the extent to which nature is included in social life, i.e., is regarded from the standpoint of society. It does not at all follow from this that society must inevitably destroy the natural world, that it must find a purely utilitarian use for it. On the contrary, ecological and conservationist activity, whose social scale is now growing, carries a great moral charge which has an ennobling effect on the active participants of ecological campaigns. In other words, social values are inevitably imposed on aesthetic contemplation of nature—even if it is purely individual and private. Nature is thus perceived in its real social function, though man may not clearly realise it. The fact is that the men who had a subtle and sensitive appreciation of nature—like Thoreau—were also those who had just as acute a perception of the social concerns.

Thus nature became a source of moral values through a complex process of socially oriented perception of the aesthetic and ecological aspects of the natural environment. Let us note, though, a most important aspect of the ethical experiencing of landscape. In the sphere of interpersonal relations, their aesthetic value is secondary in relation to the moral value, whereas in the natural environment the positions of these two kinds of value are changed. The aesthetic becomes domi-

nant, while ethical emotions are only aroused in men of a definite type, requiring a special mode of the perception of nature, a special moral-ethical attitude and mood.

Thoreau's philosophical programme, which assumed the transference of the ideal from the social to the natural world and a corresponding change in the source of ethical experience, was not essentially antisocial. Nature itself, as Thoreau understood it, reflected the light of social morality rather then emitted its own, still less transcendent, light. Movement towards nature in search of the ethical ideal merely signified the contradictory nature of the Romantic worldview, which moved toward the solution of purely social tasks and problems in a roundabout way, through a "spiritualisation" of nature. Thoreau and the Romantics might be presented as the world's greatest escapists, but their profound interest in society invariably asserted itself. The cult of nature, the deification of nature, were evidence that they viewed it as a mirror of the social, as a sign of human relations.

CHAPTER V

THE VIEW OF SOCIETY

Thoreau's escape from social life and his attempt to find an "interlocutor" in the world of untouched, wild nature, ended in a return to society at a new level—that of Romantic perception and interpretation of social phenomena.

1. Property, Division of Labour, Culture, Business: A Critical Analysis

Thoreau stood out even among the radically minded Transcendentalists as the man implacably opposed to the spiritual values approved by contemporary public opinion. This made him notorious as an extreme Left-wing radical. Some scholarly and popular-science editions therefore publish from time to time articles comparing the views of Henry Thoreau and Karl Marx. Thus M. Morand finds points of similarity between their social doctrines and even points to the fact that "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* appeared almost simultaneously (in 1849 and 1848 respectively) (see 27, *8*, 123). One of the chief ideologues of the "New Left",

Staughton Lynd, goes even further. In his book *The Origins of American Radicalism* a great deal of space is given to parallel quotations from Marx and Thoreau which are said to prove the affinity of the two philosophers' views (see 69). The American historian of social thinking David Herreshoff holds a similar opinion (see 48). The goals of these authors are different, though: in one case, Thoreau is denounced as the first American Communist, in the second, he is raised to the level of Marx.

For Thoreau, the individual's morality was the first premise and the final conclusion from any chain of socio-philosophical or political reasoning, the highest criterion for all political processes. A strict definition of moral consciousness is not to be found in any of his essays or journal entries, although moralising was an inherent feature of his worldview. The roots of this moralising apparently lay in the ideology of Puritanism, which made a considerable impact on his philosophy.

In analysing contemporary society, Thoreau chose the position of consistent and passionate denunciation of everything that did not, in his view, accord with the ideal of high spirituality and enlightenment. Thoreau's critique of American society was dominated by several themes, trends that stand out especially clearly in his works. These themes are: property, division of labour, culture, and business.

The objective of Thoreau's offensive against property was to denounce the pernicious influence of that social institution on

morality. Of course, Thoreau was far from the Marxist interpretation of property as a system of social relations. He saw property as legal right of possession. Thoreau's critique of property was therefore directed against the right to posses a thing or against a corresponding practical orientation—money-grubbing raised to the rank of a credo. "I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf... Who made them serfs of the soil?... Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born?... How many a poor immortal soul have I met wellnigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage mowing, pasture, and wood-lot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh" (100, 8).

Thoreau's critique of property entailed two consequences. On the one hand, he resolutely attacked the luxury of the ruling class, and on the other, he tried to give a precise definition of man's vital needs in order to work out a clearcut ethical norm, a programme for the individual's moral self-improvement. Thoreau's approach to these problems characteristically confused the social, political, economic, psychological, physiological and ethical aspects of the theme. The whole

was dominated by distinct moralism with a shade of Puritanical implacability: "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind... Of a life of luxury the fruit is luxury, whether in agriculture, or commerce, or literature, or art" (100, 14). Thoreau insisted on a very broad interpretation of the term "luxury", which covered not only an excess of possessions but also the very principle of hoarding. Yet Thoreau did not restrict himself to abstract moralising. The socio-political consequences of his doctrine were also fairly obvious. "The luxury of one class is counterbalanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace, on the other are the almshouse and 'silent poor'. The myriads who built the pyramids to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried themselves. The mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wigwam" (100, 31). The accumulation of excessive property in the hands of some and the absence of property among others became one of the principal themes not only in *Walden* but also in most other socio-philosophical essays of Thoreau.

Thoreau's main goal—discovering the fundamental elements of social phenomena—led him to "human nature" rather than the sphere of material production and the social relations arising on its basis. Seeing that, far from hindering the polarisation of luxury and indigence, the social relations of his times enhanced it, Thoreau came, in his search for the

root of the evil, to see the imperfection of man's morality as such a root. Thoreau therefore believed that the solution of the principal problems lay in the correction of this morality through arbitrary elimination of the very need for luxury. What were, in the philosopher's view, the necessary foundations of man's existence? "By the words, *necessary of life*, I mean whatever, of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it. To many creatures there is in this sense but one necessary of life, Food... For man in this climate may accurately enough be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success" (100, 9). Thoreau's general conclusion is as follows: only the position of voluntary poverty, or maximal restriction of one's material needs, is possible in the struggle against social evil. Confronting in this way society's false spirit, the individual builds a spiritual rampart in the path of perverted consciousness. It is in this sense that we must understand Thoreau's statement that "things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts... Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, 'and lo! creation widens to our view' ... Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy

one necessary of the soul" (100, 218). According to Thoreau's profound conviction, property, including property in the form of luxury, accumulates material and spiritual forces that are alien to the individual.

But Thoreau never raised the issue of abolishing private property as such. He believed that the source of social inequality lay in the unequal distribution of the available sum of things and possessions rather than in the principle itself of private appropriation of the results of collective social labour. It would be too bold to draw a direct parallel here between Thoreau and Rousseau, but Thoreau was obviously influenced by the ideas of egalitarianism—a fairly influential trend of thought in the USA (suffice it to recall here Thomas Jefferson). True, he did not, unlike the Enlighteners, have a Utopian faith in the possibility of equal division of all property under the existing social order. The epoch of victorious capitalist relations forced the Romantic thinker to evaluate more soberly the prospects for implementing compulsory legislative "equality". But Thoreau himself, sensing the impracticability of the egalitarian ideal, put forth the no less Utopian plan for restricting property to reasonable and necessary limits. The so-called moral argument underlying both of these Utopian theories grew considerably stronger in Thoreau's Romanticism.

The principle of restriction of property proved to be one of the links that connected the worldviews of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. This aspect of the lines of continuity between the Enlightenment and Ro-

manticism was much more distinctly manifested in the USA than in Europe. The reason for this apparently lay in the absence in America of sharp contrasts between the epoch of the bourgeois revolution and the postrevolutionary period which became in the USA the forerunner of the Romantic worldview. The problem of the division of labour became yet another link in the continuity between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Protests against the development of man into a one-sided creature, the child of a false civilisation, were expressed already by Jean Jacques Rousseau. An even stronger critique of the division of labour, which became one of the causes of alienation of the individual, was voiced in Friedrich Schiller's famous *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man (Briefe über die aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen)* (1793-1794), where the transformation of the worldview of the Enlightenment into the Romantic one was already clearly marked.

Taking the Greek of the antiquity as an ideal human being, "an integral and harmonious individual", Schiller used that ideal as a measuring rod for assessing contemporary society. Schiller was indignant at the "incompleteness" and "fragmentedness" of society's spiritual life. "Why did an individual Greek qualify as a representative of his times, and why does no individual of today dare do so? Because those were shaped by all-uniting nature, while these, by all-disuniting reason" (92, *6*, 264-265). The development of society entailed a strict delimitation of the functions of individuals which was

not accompanied by a flourishing of the personality. "As soon as, on the one hand, expanding experience and clearer thinking made necessary a more distinct division of the sciences, and on the other, the increased complexity of the state mechanism demanded a stricter division of estates and occupations, the inner union of human nature also broke down, and pernicious discord split in two its harmonious forces" (92, *6*, 265). Schiller deduced the division of labour first of all from the differentiation of spiritual processes in society, that is to say, he associated it with culture. The contradictions of culture were projected onto social life as a whole and were then imposed on the image of the individual. The delimitation of imagination and intellect—something to which Schiller attached prime importance—had a parallel in the division of or opposition between art and science. Universal "specialisation" undermined the basis of life. All social institutions were oriented towards encouraging "specialisation", which brought about a still greater destruction of the harmony of the individual. Only genius, Schiller believed, could overcome human fragmentedness. As for society as a whole, only highly developed aesthetic education can act as a remedy against the ugliness of specialisation.

Thoreau's views were largely congenial to those of Schiller, but the American philosopher considered that problem against a broader background: the division of labour, which spread to all the spheres of the country's life, made Thoreau take into account socioeconomic processes as well as culture.

However, there was no great difference between the conclusions drawn by Thoreau and those of Schiller: Thoreau also believed that the division of labour, which made man poorer, was undesirable. Regretting that men became mere particles of the social whole, Thoreau made this sarcastic comment: "It is not the tailor alone who is the ninth part of a man; it is as much a preacher, and the merchant, and the farmer. Where is this division of labor to end? and what object does it finally serve? No doubt another *may* also think for me; but it is not therefore desirable that he should do so to the exclusion of my thinking for myself" (100, 36). The division of labour, Thoreau believed, did not bring about either the flowering of the individual or his happiness and contentment. It represented a quantitative rather than qualitative growth of culture. That was why America was not yet adapted, in his view, "to *human* culture", and Americans were 'still forced to cut their *spiritual* bread far thinner than their forefathers had their wheaten (see 100, 32).

It would be unjust to present Thoreau as an obscurant rejecting the sciences, art and education in general as the necessary components of social life. Although Thoreau spoke condescendingly of contemporary art and education, he did not oppose culture as such but rather the social consequences of the Philistine interpretation of high art and science under the given concrete social structure based on private property. On the one hand, high culture was distorted, becoming a set of cliches and vulgar notions, i.e.,

fashion, and on the other, the masses in their sorry plight, material and spiritual, could not rise to an understanding of the true values of culture. Thoreau explained, quite correctly, the reason for this tragic gap between the Philistine view of culture and its true achievements: "The best works of art are the expression of man's struggle to free himself from this condition [serfdom under private property], but the effect of our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten. There is actually no place in this village for a work of *fine* art, if any had come down to us, to stand for our lives, our houses and streets furnish no proper pedestal for it. There is not a nail to hang a picture on, or a shelf to receive the bust of a hero or a saint" (100, 30). Under an unjust system, art becomes a luxury, merely stressing the ugliness of the general background. Thoreau pursued that thought along the channel of moralising: "I cannot but perceive that this so-called rich and refined life is a thing jumped at and I do not get on in the enjoyment of the fine arts which adorn it, my attention being wholly occupied with the jump... Before we can adorn our houses with beautiful objects the walls must be stripped, and our lives must be stripped and beautiful housekeeping and beautiful living be laid for a foundation: now, a taste for the beautiful is most cultivated out of doors, where there is no house and no house-keeper" (100, 31).

Thus Thoreau believed that the gap between reality and ideal would not be filled through aesthetic education (as Schiller insisted) but through the individual's moral

perfection and subsequent changes in the forms of social life. Education in the framework of official routine could not, he thought, provide true knowledge which consists in the ability to understand the world, i.e., to experience and interpret it. Besides, education in contemporary society was, in Thoreau's view, wretched and one-sided, as were the people who worked in it. Still, Thoreau did not reject the need for spreading knowledge: "It is time that villages were universities, and their elder inhabitants the fellows of universities... Shall the world be confined to one Paris and one Oxford forever? The one hundred and twenty-five dollars annually subscribed for a Lyceum in the winter is better spent than any other equal sum raised in the town. If we live in the Nineteenth Century, why should we not enjoy the advantages which the Nineteenth Century offers?... Let the reports of all the learned societies come to us, and we will see if they know anything" (100, 78). Thoreau's broad programme for an educational reform of Concord ended in an unambiguous proposition in the spirit of the Age of Reason: "Instead of noblemen, let us have noble villages of men. If it is necessary, omit one bridge over the river, go round a little there, and throw one arch at least over the darker gulf of ignorance which surrounds us" (100, 78-79).

Now, did Thoreau remain an Enlightener in the spirit of Rousseau and the Encyclopedists? Things are a bit more complicated than that. Thoreau subjected the propositions of the Enlightenment to a Romantic reconstruc-

tion. He dreamed of restoring the unity of the human perception of the world, split by civilisation. The issue thus arose of overcoming the vices of civilisation. There were two ways of achieving that result, according to Thoreau: (a) one could abandon civilisation, opposing oneself to society "externally" (cf. Rousseau's call for a return to nature, or the Walden experiment), or (b) one could overcome civilisation from inside, arriving at a moral condemnational and radical rejection of civilisation through an understanding of its complexities.

This second path required "enlightenment" as Thoreau understood it. While the classics of the Enlightenment appealed to man as a social being, and saw the spreading of knowledge as the path towards the building of a new society, Thoreau the Romantic appealed to man as an autonomous unique personality, and called for the use of knowledge to denounce the moral degradation of bourgeois society, and to create a basis for an inner moral revolution. But that was not all that Thoreau had to say on this subject. A moral revolution, he went on to argue, radically transformed all the value parameters of life in the individual's consciousness. As a result, true knowledge became one of the leading social forces. It is in this sense that Thoreau's following statement should be understood: "When one man has reduced a fact of imagination to be a fact to his understanding, I foresee that all men will at length establish their lives on that basis" (100, 12).

The very essence of Thoreau's worldview lay in the fact that his appeal to the irra-

tional, to anti-reason was a forced and temporary measure. From anti-reason to absolute Reason, from negation of cultures to true culture, from rejection of art and science to all-embracing and true art and science—such was the logic of Thoreau's argument.

Thoreau's conception of contemporary society was neither speculative nor superficial. In endeavouring to discover the inner sources of the moral discord and overall disharmony dominating life, Thoreau did not pass over in silence the concrete and most characteristic socioeconomic and political phenomena and institutions of American society.

One of these socioeconomic phenomena which, in Thoreau's view, embodied the typical features of contemporary social structure was the business system. Thoreau saw business as something more than a mode of obtaining profit. For him, it was a symbol of society's perverted spirit and degrading morality. The objectives of business, Thoreau believed, were directly opposed to those of high culture and morality. "This world is a place of business," Thoreau stated bitterly. "What an infinite bustle! I am awakened almost every night by the panting of the locomotive. It interrupts my dreams. There is no sabbath. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once. It is nothing but work, work, work. I cannot easily buy a blank-book to write thoughts in it; they are commonly ruled for dollars and cents. An Irishman, seeing me making a minute in the fields, took it for granted that I was calculating my wages. If a man was tossed out of a window when he was an infant, and so made a cripple

for life, or scared out of his wits by the Indians, it is regretted chiefly because he was thus incapacitated for—business! I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself, than this incessant business"(99, *4*, 456).

The concept of business, dealt with in *Walden* and in "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", grew into a philosophical symbol. In speaking of the business system, Thoreau referred almost always to a certain mighty social force accumulating in itself the darkest sides of the human personality. Business was a sign of militant lack of spirituality building a social, economic and even political organisation and generating ethical principles alien to genuine human morality. In his works Thoreau debunked the system of private enterprise, endeavouring to combine two viewpoints or critical positions—a socio-political and a moral-philosophical one. Critique of an unjust social system recreates, in Thoreau's view, the integrality of world perception, for a gap between politics and morality in society signifies the latter's degradation, and the desirable goal of their reunification.

Following his method, Thoreau stressed not so much economic as moral-symbolical aspects in business. The image-concept of business logically entailed two other notions—"hurry" and "expediency". "It [society] lives too fast... Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?... Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches today to save nine tomorrow. As for *work*, we haven't any of any consequences. We have the Saint Vitus' dance,

and cannot possibly keep our heads still" (100, 67). The hurry makes people skim the surface of life without going into its deeper meaning. The children of business and civilisation run, with equal indifference, over the bodies and fates of those who keep to a different rhythm of existence. The Romantic protest against the levelling of individuality in society acquired a special significance in Thoreau's worldview, becoming in fact a protest against free enterprise. The latest achievements of civilisation, which was essentially hostile to the interests of men, driving them all the time, were personified, in Thoreau's view, by the railways. He wrote, with barely contained anger, that gangs of trackmen saw to it that 'the sleepers" — the men who died in building the railways—did not rise and destroy these railways (see 100, 67). The constant hurry, speedup, suppression of the individual—all these were facts of the same order, directly opposed to the truly human spiritual values.

Thoreau also attacked, with great critical force, expediency raised to the rank of the highest principle of business. More than that, having set himself the task of exposing the anti-spiritual essence of Philistine utilitarianism, Thoreau ran to an extreme, rejecting all expediency, including the expediency of the production process. Naked practicality, inherent in the Philistine world perception, was in Thoreau's view the basis of business itself as well as of its moral consequences maiming the spirit. Despite the seeming business activity and constant hurry, man sank into intellectual lethargy. Thoreau introduced the

concept of moral expediency opposed to the Utilitarian one: "a people, as well as an individual, must do justice, cost what it may. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself ... he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it" (99, *4*, 361-362).

The moral goal was for Thoreau the highest and last criterion for evaluating any fact, any policy. In the end, the philosopher brought a charge of amoralism against contemporary society, pointing out that that amoralism was growing progressively worse, and that it created the state as a specific political superstructure for its defence.

2. Debunking the State

Despite the apparent alienation of Transcendentalism from men's everyday, mundane cares, from social life and politics, "under the stress of ... an emergency the transcendentalist [Thoreau] was driven to examine the whole theory of the relation of the individual to the state" (82, *2*, 408). Traditionally, Thoreau's political views were characterised as related to anarchism. But this opinion is not quite correct.

Thoreau began his essay "On the Duty of Disobedience" with the words of Theodore Parker, founder of Brook Farm: "That government is best which governs least..." He then suggested a logical development of that thesis: "That government is best which governs not at all". It would appear that this statement indeed placed Thoreau among anarchists,

who rejected the state's positive value entirely. However, in that same essay Thoreau expressed an idea that was clearly different from the above: "But, to speak practically, and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government" (99, *4*, 357). The democratic critique of American statehood, on the whole so fervent, ended in these words: "I please myself with imagining a State at least which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellowmen" (99, *4*, 387).

Thus we observe, on the one hand, a nihilism in relation to the state, and on the other, a desire to improve the existing forms of government. In other words, the main methodological contradiction of Thoreau's political critique was that he tried to combine two hardly compatible viewpoints. As a consistent Transcendentalist, he could not recognise the existing state norms as legal, for true communities of men only arose, according to Thoreau, on the basis of transcendent spiritual links. As a sincere democrat, though, Thoreau believed that political realities called for a conscious struggle for the revival of democratic elements contained in state institutions rather than for an uncontrolled assault on them. At all stages of the evolution of his thinking, that thinking was characterised by a certain duality, as far as the state was con-

cerned. Even at the time of the greatest upsurge of democratic forces, on the eve of the Civil War, Thoreau remained true to his Transcendentalist ideals.

In the final analysis, Thoreau's state was nothing but the ideal of bourgeois democracy, and the individual's personal freedom was the main issue for him. Thoreau had little faith in the realisation of personal freedoms under the system of American democracy. But he searched for new perspectives in the framework of the Transcendentalist Utopia rather than socialism (not even in its Utopian form). In the concluding lines of the programmatic essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" the idea was expressed of the development of the ideal democratic state into a Transcendental one. "A [democratic] State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen" (99, *4*, 387).

This fairly vague image of the ideal state was precisely the basis of Thoreau's Romantic critique. But he did not merely posit the ideal—he also suffered profoundly seeing its incompatibility with the objectively existing state of affairs. Thoreau gave an explicit conceptual form to his Romantic emotional attitude. The tragic worldview characteristic of the Romantic was placed, as it were, beyond the framework of his personal attitude to the world ("Self and the world") and interpreted in broader terms, as experiencing the tragicalness of the relation of "other" men to forms of social life alien to them. That

was exactly why the highest point attained by Thoreau's critical thought was the synthetic image-concept of desperation.

In Thoreau's view, desperation was a kind of universal property of human existence in a situation of general oppression: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation... A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind" (99, *4*, 387). The concept of desperation is close in Thoreau to that of alienation. Robert Dickens, an American student of Thoreau's work, directly stated that the concepts of alienation and desperation, as used by Thoreau, were synonymous, although the former presented the phenomenon from an economic and social standpoint, while the latter, from an artistic-ethical one. Dickens also indicated that there were three aspects of alienation in Thoreau's social treatises: (a) alienation of the individual as producer; (b) alienation of the individual as consumer, and (c) the relation of industrialisation and capitalism to alienation (see 24, 62). Other aspects, however, can also be identified in Thoreau's works: alienation of man and society from nature, alienation of man from state institutions and finally, alienation of man from his own essence.

Thoreau suffered especially acutely from the latter type of alienation: "It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself. Talk of a divinity in man!" (100, 10). The splitting of personality was, in Thoreau's view, a direct conse-

quence of social conditions. Concentrated in this type of alienation was, he believed, the entire tragedy of the contemporary epoch, the realisation by man of the falsity of his position and the inability to change radically the external situation. However, Thoreau's sensitivity to all manifestations of social or moral evil did not obscure for him the horizons of a positive solution of men's problems.

Thoreau's positive programme was marked by a combination of sober criticism in relation to contemporary society with inner optimism, with faith in the possibility of changing the position of men. But the weaker side of his theoretical propositions stood out clearly in this part of his worldview. Leaving the firm soil of negation and critique of the social institutions, he appealed to individual consciousness, thus taking a step from critical realism to a social Utopia.

3. A Positive Alternative: Solitude and Non-Resistance

Nihilism was alien to Thoreau's philosophy. The positive ideal implicitly precedes in it any assessment, even the most critical, of certain social phenomena. To some extent it is this that makes Thoreau's critique of society more convincing and effective. In other words, there are better grounds for calling Thoreau's philosophical position the position of assertion than that of negation. Traditionally, Thoreau is seen as representing an ideological trend completely rejecting the value of social life as such. "Thoreau is anti-

social"—that is the idea more or less distinctly expressed in many studies. This viewpoint, though, is not quite correct, although it does have some basis in reality.

At 22, having just graduated from Harvard, Thoreau wrote in his *Journal*: "There is a *terra firma* in society as well as in geography, some promised land whose ports you may make by dead reckoning in all weather. All the rest are but floating and fabulous Atlantides which sometimes skirt the western horizon of our intercourse" (99, 7, 77). The quest for a *terra firma* ran through the whole of Thoreau's work. In the most general sense, it was a search for the social force on which one could rely and which would personify spirituality and transcendentality in society. In Thoreau's opinion, "the mass", or "the mob", could not be that kind of force. He substantiated this proposition in his lecture on "Society" (1833), prompted by his impressions from a visit to an annual cattle-show. "The mass," wrote Thoreau, "never comes up to the standard of its best member, but on the contrary degrades itself to a level with the lowest. As the reformers say, it is a levelling down, not up. Hence the mass is only another name for the mob. The inhabitants of the earth assembled in one place would constitute the greatest mob. The mob is spoken of as an insane and blinded animal; magistrates say it must be humoured; they apprehend it may incline this way or that, as villagers dread an inundation, not knowing whose land may be flooded, nor how many bridges carried away" (99, 7, 36, 37).

This statement, taken out of context, puts in question the democratic nature of Thoreau's social theory. The contemptuous reference to the people as a mob that cannot be controlled and is alien to logic and reason was current among a number of active antidemocrats—Thoreau's forerunners and contemporaries. Alexander Hamilton, one of the founders of militant antidemocratism in American political thinking, openly spoke of the people in extremely disparaging and cynical words (see 81, 61). If we were to analyse in full Thoreau's work quoted here, we shall see that Thoreau's accusations were levelled against traders and landowners and not against the people in general. "One goes to a cattle-show expecting to find many men and women assembled, and beholds only working oxen and meat cattle" (99, 7, 37). Even on the day of awarding prizes it was difficult to find in the crowd "the men of the country", for, even if such a citizen finds himself at a cattle show, "he is fain to take himself out of sight and hearing ... lest he lose his own identity in the nonentities around him" (99, 7, 37). While rejecting any socio-economic characteristics of the social forces, and even more so, of class divisions in society, Thoreau singles out the stratum of Philistines entirely devoid of spiritual goals. Even if such a Philistine bourgeois observes a semblance of loyalty to the principles of democracy, that does not change anything in real fact. "There are thousands who are *in opinion* opposed to slavery and to the war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them; who, esteeming themselves children of

Washington and Franklin, sit down with their hands in their pockets, and say that they do not know what to do, and do nothing; who even postpone the question of freedom to the question of free trade, and quietly read the prices-current along with the latest advices from Mexico, after dinner, and, it may be, fall asleep over them both" (99, *4*, 362, 363). With the sobriety and shrewdness of a true democrat Thoreau wrote that "the opponents to a reform in Massachusetts are not a hundred politicians at the South, but a hundred thousand merchants and farmers here, who are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico..." (99, *4*, 362).

It would thus be useless, according to Thoreau, to look for the principal active force among the propertied strata of the population, even if these strata were the carriers of business and commercial activity. The outward dynamism of their efficiency mostly goes hand in hand with spiritual stagnation.

As for the indigent classes, Thoreau was sincerely sympathetic to them. "Most men, even in this comparatively free country," he wrote, "through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the

market. He has no time to be anything but a machine" (100, 9). It is easy to see what "finer fruits" Thoreau had in mind: the true spiritual culture opposed to the external achievements of civilisation. Indeed, the lower strata of American society could not be the carriers of such culture in Thoreau's times. The philosopher's attitude towards the proletariat was therefore dual: compassion on the one hand and realisation of the cultural gap dividing him from the proletariat, on the other. Thoreau himself was fully aware of the vulnerability of this position: "Compassion is a very untenable ground. It must be expeditious" (100, 211).

The contradictions inherent in Thoreau's views stood out especially clearly at this point. The propertied class, which held in its hands all power and culture, was for Thoreau an object of the harshest critique and denunciation. As for the indigent class, or the working masses, they were too oppressed, downtrodden and culturally backward, in Thoreau's opinion, to be able to fight evil consciously. Then there were the "heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense", coming both from the bourgeoisie and from among the working men who rose to serve their country (99, *4*, 360). However, Thoreau did not share fully Carlyle's hero worship, and thus realised that these courageous men could hardly have a radical effect on the inertia of social life.

Here the circle closed. Wherever Thoreau might look, he saw either hostile bitterness or passive submission, or endless sacrifices. Social reality itself seemed to push him to-

wards nihilism. His acute moral sense prompted him that capitalism was subject to inner erosion, that its existence was unjustified, as it did not accord with the higher laws of the spirit. But a reasonable search for a social force capable of remaking the existing system led each time up a blind alley. That entailed not only a separation and opposition of feeling and reason but also a gradual withdrawing of the Romantic from the surrounding social being. Analysing the entire system of relations between the individual and society, he came to the sad conclusion that the true philosopher could not engage in a dialogue with society on an equal footing: he had to stand either above it or at a distance from it.

However, the originality of Thoreau's worldview imposed an imprint on the traditional Romantic scheme in this area as well. Alienation from society as such was never a source of philosophical or literary inspiration for Thoreau. On the contrary, the more he was disappointed by social life and the farther he moved away from it, the greater was his desire to overcome this alienation and to come closer to the world of men—at a new level of his ideological evolution, and armed with a fresh arsenal of arguments in favour of his Romantic understanding of the world. "To be alone was something unpleasant", wrote Thoreau. "But I was at the same time conscious of a light insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery" (100, 92). That is why we must not be surprised that Thoreau wrote his most acute socio-political treatise precisely during his Walden

experiment. And at the end of his life, drawn into an active political struggle by events, he wrote, along with impassioned political essays, works describing his impressions and sensations inspired by landscape contemplation.

However that may be, an unflinching desire to find a solid basis, a *terra firma*, in the depth of unstable social life, and his despair about the ability of any social forces to become such *terra firma*, drove Thoreau to a radical philosophical conclusion: the only highest reality and the most effective principle lie in the domain of individual consciousness—in man's conscience, will, and faith. This conclusion was in excellent agreement with his general Transcendentalist idealist views. There was no absolute, Thoreau believed, and no source of the truth apart from an inner sense of justice, a readiness to give one's life unhesitatingly to the cause of the salvation of mankind, and of enlightened faith in the social ideal. The transcendent moral spirit was infused in man through individual consciousness and built a harmonious unity, a community of spiritual and noble souls.

Thoreau saw society as a dynamic ensemble of individuals unique in their spiritual originality. The forms of uniting men are temporary and transient, while their personal relationship in the universe, determined by their consciousness, are stable and significant. It is in this link of the socio-cosmic connection and interdependence, Thoreau believed, that one had to look for the lever that sets social development in motion. Thoreau's socio-political philosophy rested on three pillars:

humanist democratism, Transcendental idealism, and consistent individualism. That triune combination was highly unusual in its character but it followed logically from Thoreau's entire philosophical worldview.

It appears that the researchers' greatest attention is now attracted to three episodes from Thoreau's ideological and practical evolution: the Walden experiment, the declaration of the programme for a nonviolent revolution, and Thoreau's solidarity with John Brown, leader of the armed uprising for the liberation of black slaves. The first two episodes were widely reported in American historical and historico-philosophical literature, and gave rise to numerous specialist and popular-science works. It is on these two facts that the widely current image of Thoreau as an escapist and champion of non-violence rests. As for the third episode, it is hardly amenable to explication in terms of the traditionally instilled image, and is therefore much more rarely discussed in American literature. Let us consider each of these episodes separately.

Thoreau's retreat, in 1845-1847, to the shores of Lake Walden, was not something done out of desperation or disappointment in mankind. Underlying the experiment was a well-thought out general philosophical principle—a whole theory of solitude. In Rousseau and Zimmermann solitude was considered above all to be a creative act of concentration of consciousness, immersion in the reflexions of moral consciousness, whereas in Thoreau quite different motifs arose, namely, the theme of tragic alienation of the

individual forced to break off the ties with his social group. As a result of this trend in the development of Thoreau's ideas, the concept of solitude increasingly gave way to that of loneliness—obviously quite a different notion. In this sense, Thoreau straddled the border between two epochs, so to speak. One of them was linked with Romanticisation of the lonely observer perceiving the beauty of the universe in his solitude, the other reflected flares of tragic alienation which isolated man from other individuals, erecting barries of misunderstanding, indifference and moral turpitude between them. It is difficult to say to which of these epochs Thoreau belonged to a greater extent. It may well be that his philosophical uniqueness lay precisely in the fact that, being extremely sensitive to the contradictions of the capitalist city with its loneliness of man, he was at the same time full of optimistic faith in the possibility of overcoming this loneliness through Romantic solitude in the womb of nature. However that may be, conscious isolation from society was for Thoreau a means of solving his positive programme.

The Walden experiment was above all an attempt at studying man, the laws of his spiritual growth, the limits of his power over nature, and his strength. To understand man, Thoreau argued, one had to get to the very bottom of his nature. And that required the elimination of all the false motives of behaviour and restriction of his numerous needs to just a few vitally necessary ones. The experiment brought Thoreau to the conclusion that simpler existence facilitated a more in-

tense spiritual life. That was why the slogan, "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" became the sum total of his ethical studies (100, 66).

Assuming that philosophical and ethical arguments were not convincing enough for sober-minded and practical Americans, Thoreau worked out a system of economic calculations proving, in his view, the advantages of voluntary working poverty. Thoreau taught that man could be independent from the forms of communal life alien to him. Thus the most important goal of the Walden Utopia was demonstrating the individual's self-value and what Transcendentalists called the individual's self-reliance.

Union with nature was the basis and the stimulus of the experiment undertaken by Thoreau. As is clear from certain passages in *Walden* and the *Journal*, Thoreau believed that the programme could not have been realised without the natural environment, without contemplation of nature every day and every hour. "The most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man" (100, 92). "I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude" (100, 92). "I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post-office, the bar-room, the meeting-house, the school-house, the grocery, Beacon Hill, or the Five Points, where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have

found that to issue, as the willow stands near water and sends out its roots in the direction. This will vary with different natures, but this is the place where a wise man will dig his cellar..." (100, 93).

Thoreau did not, of course, call for a mass exodus into the woods. By no means. He believed, though, that each individual had to go through a spiritual renewal or rebirth, in one way or another. However varied the modes of attaining that goal might be, man had to be guided by general principles worked out in the course of the Walden experiment. It would hardly be possible to implement them fully, but it was not the final result that was important but the movement towards a finite and absolute goal. *Walden* was precisely the kind of philosophical handbook that outlined the principal landmarks on the path towards that goal.

The Walden Utopia and the Walden experiment were antisocial in their outward form only. "I think that I love society as much as most, and I am ready enough to fasten myself like a blood-sucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way. I am naturally no hermit...", wrote Thoreau (100, 97). In leaving for the woods, the philosopher in no way negated by that fact man's social experiences and social nature. He wanted but one thing—a radical refashioning of man's consciousness, a cleansing of it from perverted forms of social ideology. In trying to break the chain of reproduction at the point of individual consciousness, Thoreau used a patently weak weapon—propaganda of his personal philosophical conditions not

based on any mass socioeconomic reforms. The awareness of the inadequacy and incompleteness of the principle of individualism apparently became one of the reasons why in later years Thoreau shifted the focus of his interest, turning to man as a full-fledged social individual, a citizen of a concrete political system. We refer here to the positive sociophilosophical platform expounded in "On the Duty of Social Disobedience".

The main objective of the essay was to answer the question of what an individual must do if he loses entirely his faith in the political system under which he has to live. As the author of Walden, Thoreau could cite his own example both on the theoretical and on the practical counts, and thus answer the question "what to do?" as follows: leave society, or stay in it in a state of spiritual loneliness. Thoreau realised, though, that that path was exceptional rather than typical, Utopian rather than real. A different mode of attaining moral purity and of rousing themselves from spiritual torpitude had to be pointed out to men who rejected the social system but did not at all want to become forest dwellers. So Thoreau proclaimed the principle of open political protest.

The first chapter of *Walden*, "Economy", and the first pages of the essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" were devoted to one and the same subject—a description of the individual's utter disappointment in the moral-social (*Walden*) and moral-political ("On the Duty...") aspects of city life. In both cases the author led the reader to a realisation of a complete crisis of all the links

connecting man and society. "Not till we are lost, in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves..." (100, 118). "I answer, that he [the individual] cannot without disgrace be associated with it [the government]. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also" (99, *4*, 360).

Both in *Walden* and in "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", man's alienation from society develops into a sense of absolute opposition and even hostility between the two. In *Walden*, though, the critical situation arises gradually, from within man, as it were (although Thoreau does not, of course, negate its external social causes), and is gradually and peacefully resolved in the act of his leaving for the world of nature, whereas in "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" man's basic inner despair about the injustice of the surrounding world is sharply intensified both as a result of a personal crisis (Thoreau's incarceration) and as a result of the overall crisis of the country (the growing acuteness of the slavery problem, the aggression against Mexico). The socio-political reality now demanded that Thoreau overcome Transcendental individualism, for his personal crisis proved to be part of the general crisis of the state's credibility. The harsh individualism was undoubtedly softened, as witnessed by Thoreau's programme for a non-violent revolution.

A nonviolent revolution has two aspects, an external, political one and an internal or moral one. On the external side, Thoreau's

programme was as follows: "If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible" (99, *4*, 371). Thus a necessary condition of civil disobedience must be the general refusal to pay federal taxes. All true patriots, Thoreau believed, must act in accordance with that principle. Then the campaign of peaceful protest would reach its next stage: "If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, 'But what shall I do?' my answer is, 'If you really wish to do anything, resign your office.' When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished" (99, *4*, 371). We are to understand, then, that Thoreau laid particular stress on state apparatus officers, for their refusal to work would in his view undermine the foundations of the entire political system faster than anything else. (Leaving aside for the time being analysis of other contradictions of this programme, we must point out the absolutely obvious incompatibility between the motive forces and, so to speak, the direct executors of the revolution. The lower social strata, which suffer most from oppression, were expected to "force" state officers, i.e., the men who implement this oppression, to carry out the will of the "highest law").

A most important aspect of the nonviolent revolution was that a mass political protest

had to be preceded by an inner moral upheaval in the minds of all individuals. This upheaval in consciousness was primary in relation to an explosion of nonviolent protest, which consolidated politically something that had been achieved in the sphere of individual consciousness. Once correct moral convictions were acquired, the success of the struggle for a progressive social system was ensured. Thus the mass character of a protest campaign was viewed by Thoreau almost entirely in terms of a sum of individual protests and moral convictions. Anything that might in one way or another violate the absolute personal immunity and rights of the individual was rejected outright. That was why the ensuring of guarantees of the individual's independence rather than social justice was regarded as the ultimate goal of a nonviolent revolution. "There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly" (99, *4*, 387).

Thoreau's anarchist theory of spontaneity of individual protest grew on this obviously Utopian basis. "Other members of the [Transcendentalist] group professed to have found a better way out of the dilemma—the way of Brook Farm and Fruitland; a richer life was to be achieved not by expousing poverty but by cooperation. But Thoreau could not adopt the cooperative solution", wrote Parrington (82, *2*, 406). As we said earlier, Utopian experiments started by the Transcendentalists invariably aroused the mistrust of

the philosopher who valued independence of thought and action above all.

Thoreau's individualist views have to be assessed in a concrete historical context. Individualism has two sides, as it were—offensive and defensive. The offensive aspect was most strongly manifested in the principle of free trade and private enterprise. However, running into the superior forces of large-scale industry and commercial and financial bourgeoisie, the petty producer was subject to considerable economic and ideological pressure which ultimately led him to a spiritual collapse. Big business works out its own forms of collectiveness, unacceptable to the petty producer. Individualism then becomes a defensive instrument manifested in various theories preaching escapism, running away to nature, dropping out of society. Of course, this polarisation of the interests of the individual and of big business collectivist forms is made fully manifest only in the 20th century, but some rudimentary forms of it could be observed in the USA as early as the 1830s-1840s. Thoreau, a thoughtful researcher in social life, became one of the most passionate critics of the anti-democratic tendencies in politics and public affairs generally.

The conflict between the individual and the collectivism of major property-owners inclined towards dictatorship resulted as a rule in a spontaneous rebellion. "The rebellion may be active or passive, openly expressed or latent, buried within the individual" (107, 115). Individualism proves to be striking but ineffective and short-lived form of a defensive reaction against economic and socio-ideo-

logical pressure. From the philosophical standpoint, defensive individualism is based on man's realisation of his autonomy in relation to the concrete material conditions of life. Both Thoreau himself and his followers invariably stressed that, however awful life might be, man could always find happiness and quiet within himself. The richness of the inner world war surpassed, they were convinced, all the good things of outward life. In Thoreau, the principle of spiritual solitude went hand in hand with an anarchist individualist ideology. "I live," he wrote, "in the angle of a leaden wall into whose composition was poured a little alloy of bell-metal. Often, in the repose of my midday, there reaches my ears a confused *tintinnabulum* from without. It is the noise of my contemporaries" (100, 218).

It would appear that Thoreau and some of his contemporaries the Transcendentalists will forever be thought of as convinced escapists disdaining social life and looking to the individual's self-perfection as the only path leading into the future. Many researchers link up, not without some justification, the roots of this philosophy of escape with Emerson's well-known principle of self-reliance. This principle, though, is just as ambiguous and contradictory as many other aspects of the Transcendentalists' and Thoreau's worldview.

"Believe your own thought". That was Emerson's inspiring aphoristic slogan calling on each individual to trust his intuition, his inner self concealing the truth that is near and clear to all men. More than that, trust in oneself was a demand for freeing the indi-

vidual from the burden of Puritanical dogmata, for encouraging self-education and man's greater exactingness in relation to oneself. Emerson taught that the individual had to use all means to increase his self-sufficient value, studying the deeper aspects of culture, history and nature. In other words, trust in oneself was the part to one's self enriching human society as a whole.

Although they had an abstract ring, these ideas of Emerson were ultimately engendered by American reality itself. The society in which Transcendentalists lived was increasingly subject to ideological and political control, and the social structures exerted pressure on the Americans' spiritual and civil liberty—unobtrusively but implacably. Conformism became a widespread mode of social morality. In this sense, the principle of self-reliance forced each thinking person to rise in arms against stagnation and ossification of thought, indicating at the same time the need for building an original American culture trusting in its people and democratic principles rather than copying indiscriminately European models. The self-reliance principle also reveals quite different aspects, including consistent individualism which at times tends to be extreme. The fact is that that principle signified retreat into oneself, the desire to be lost without trace in the sweet and enticing labyrinths of the soul's self-cognition. Both Emerson and Thoreau implied a priori that the individual's inner world and its universal significance was incomparably greater than what is outside it, including society. And that was quite a different programme,

quite a different frame of mind—one that tended towards extreme individualism.

In the broadest sense, resorting to the idea of the spirit is inevitable in the petty-bourgeois individualist's worldview, for only the spirit gives him some confidence about tomorrow, about the very possibility of tomorrow.

4. Henry Thoreau and John Brown: From Non-Resistance to Resistance

The third significant episode of the evolution of Thoreau's socio-philosophical views was connected with the uprising led by John Brown. Thoreau resolutely took the insurgents' side. He called a rally in defence of Captain Brown in Concord despite the protests of members of the Republican Party who regarded that rally as inopportune. Thoreau made a long speech at the rally, which was later published as "A Speech in Defense of Captain Brown". The fact that an active champion of non-violence and moral self-perfection wrote a passionate apology for a leader of an armed uprising indicated Thoreau's departure from his former strict code of non-violence. Perfectly aware that John Brown's armed uprising was a resort to a political instrument, not just to man's inner world, Thoreau recognised unambiguously his right to a rebellion, for the leader of the uprising carried out, in Thoreau's view, a triple task: he roused the people from lethargy, demonstrated contempt for the government, and set a personal example

of high heroism in doing all this (see 43, 66).

In his "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", Thoreau already expressed the view that even one person could rouse a vast country. He saw John Brown not only as an outstanding hero but also as a messiah of the transcendent good. In any case, Thoreau regarded John Brown as an example of an ideal personality: "A man of rare common sense and directness of speech, as of action; a transcendentalist, above all a man of ideas and principles—that was what distinguished him." (99, *4*, 413).

In his "Speech..." there were quite a few ideas that were close to what he had said in "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience". In the words of Thoreau, John Brown "had the courage to face his country herself when she was in the wrong" (99, *4*, 411). "The only government that I recognize ... is the power that establishes justice" (99, *4*, 430). "Is it not possible that an individual may be right and a government wrong?" (99, *4*, 437). The essay as a whole shows that Thoreau attempted to achieve a theoretical reconciliation of the principles of Transcendental moralism with his admiration for the courage of the fearless insurgent.

Earlier, in his essay on "Slavery in Massachusetts", Thoreau wrote with bitterness on the tragic loss of faith in social justice: "I have lived for the last month ... with the sense of having suffered a vast and indefinite loss. I did not know at first what ailed me. At last it occurred to me that what I had lost was a country" (99, *4*, 405). The split in Thoreau's worldview was gradually overcome

after John Brown's selfless act. However convincing the theoretical arguments for the "Speech..." being a continuation of "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" might be, the emphases are distinctly different: the role of socio-political judgments in the former is much greater than in the latter. Thoreau did not just admire John Brown's fearlessness—he shared his social views. "It was his peculiar doctrine," wrote Thoreau, "that a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave. I agree with him" (99, 4 433). But that agreement was only prompted to Thoreau by extreme circumstances. Ideally, however, a revolution must be bloodless, in the philosopher's view. In a note passed to his friends on the eve of his execution, John Brown wrote that he was convinced that the crimes of his sinful country could only be washed clean by blood, and that he had been wrong to entertain the idea that that goal could be achieved without bloodshed (see 25). It may well be that these words were addressed to Thoreau, among others.

The last stage in the evolution of Thoreau's worldview shows that, despite the Transcendentalist basis of his views, his democratic convictions were extraordinarily strong. That was what made him take the side of black men and farmers at the time of the upsurge in their revolutionary struggle. The course of the social struggle made a decisive impact on the philosopher. Thoreau's adherence to non-violence at the early stages of his evolution was explained by the absence of real social forces capable of changing the social

system, probably more than by any other causes. But when those forces moved into the forefront, the philosopher decided to join them.

Despite the complexity and contradictions of Thoreau's socio-philosophical worldview, the democratic tendency in it always proved to be dominant and could never be repressed. It often came in conflict with Thoreau's Transcendentalism and that was the cause of the ideological inconsistency and the compromises of the positions he took, but, looking at Thoreau in the historical perspective, we see him now as one of the proponents of the tradition that grew out of the American people's revolutionary struggle for independence and was the forerunner of the Left Radical ideology of the second American revolution—the Civil War of 1862-1865.

CHAPTER VI

AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ITS ECHOES TODAY

It is not too rare that facts and phenomena in the history of thought seemingly limited in importance, whether individual systems of views or major trends bearing the stamp of historical or geographical regionalism, pose before modern researchers highly important controversial issues whose significance is not limited to the specialist disciplines of a particular human science; breaking through the framework of these disciplines, such issues become the focus of attention of different social sciences. This is exactly the state of affairs in the studies of American Transcendentalism, which was not only the background of Henry Thoreau's theoretical quest but also its deep-lying content. In these days, the philosophical heritage of Thoreau and the Transcendentalists is a matter of great interest to historians of literature, philosophy, aesthetics, and socio-political systems, and this interest is quite natural.

Brought to life by the Romantic wave that swept through American culture in the first half of the 19th century, Transcendentalism laid no claims to great discoveries in literature, philosophy, and socio-political thought. Infused with the spirit of Romanticism, the

Transcendentalism of Ralph Emerson and Henry Thoreau gradually petered out in the second half of the 19th century, and for many decades it became no more than an interesting chapter in the history of American thought.

However, the turbulent cataclysms in the ideological evolution of Western intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s have showed clearly that the Romantic Transcendentalist schemata constructed in the 19th century, far from sinking into oblivion, have taken a new lease of life in these days. Interaction between complex and sometimes contradictory social factors, essentially different from those that determined the content of 19th-century Transcendentalism results either in rediscovery of what existed, in fact, nearly 150 years ago, or in direct borrowing of Romantic and Transcendentalist ideas, although these sometimes figure in a fairly unusual context.

The first, and most important, question arising in connection with the contemporary echoes of the philosophy of Thoreau and the Transcendentalists is this: is not the present-day Left Radical and alternative consciousness a variety of the general Romantic worldview, i.e., yet another neo-Romanticism?

1. Debate on Romanticism and Contemporary Counterculture

The debate on Romanticism is one of those controversies which are insoluble at their very core. Part of this insolubility lies in the fact that the terms Romanticism and Romantic

themselves are used in different and far from clear meanings—which as we know, never made scholarly debate particularly fruitful. Still, it is possible to identify three principal standpoints on what Romanticism is. These three approaches are largely applicable to the interpretation of Thoreau's heritage.

The first viewpoint is this: Romanticism is basically an artistic method that can be regarded as an "immature form" of realism. The adherents of this view see Romanticism as a purely artistic, literary phenomenon, which, although it reflected the public's mentality, was neither universal nor many-faceted or historically stable (see 52).

The second viewpoint recognises the worldview significance of Romanticism. In purely external terms, this was manifested in the use of the capital R in Romanticism, which made it a rather special concept expressing the essence of an epoch—the epoch of Romanticism, just as in "the epoch of the Renaissance" or "the epoch of the Enlightenment" (see 52). The adherents of this position pointed out that Romanticism was not merely an artistic phenomenon but a complex worldview system which covered all the spheres of society's spiritual life and reflected a number of important attitudes: on the one hand, disappointment in the possibility of constructing a reasonable social system, and on the other, faith in the existence of different, "ideal" relations between men and of a corresponding system of social institutions. This viewpoint links Romanticism with a chronologically clearly defined epoch in most national cultures, i.e., the first half of the 19th

century. As for Romanticism outside these limits, it is regarded as a series of exceptions from artistic practice.

Finally, the adherents of the *third viewpoint* regard Romanticism as something greater than a purely historical system of world perception chronologically limited to the 19th century. In this interpretation, Romanticism emerges as a stable phenomenon of social consciousnesss equally inherent in the past and the present centuries. Thus the Soviet scholar Kseniya Myalo points out that characteristic of the last few decades was the mass spreading in the West of the principal propositions of Romanticism with their emphasis on the primary role of intuition, the imagination, the individual's free self-revelation in existence that unfolds itself as a tireless search for the self. Thus Romanticism is not only a trend in art but, above all, a definite perception of the world and a corresponding life style. Romanticism has broad links both with the past, in which it searches for its original sources, and with the future (see 56). The philosophy of Thoreau, now canonised, as it were, as a saint of counterculture, is one of these sources of 20th-century Romanticism.

Counterculture, or alternative culture, which is the heir of Romanticism and a carrier of the neo-Romantic mood today, accumulates various complex and contradictory tendencies characteristic of the present-day Western intelligentsia. The links between counterculture and 19th-century Romanticism, the ideological affinities between these essentially different trends of thought, are

extremely revealing. These affinities explain the mystery of the popularity of Henry Thoreau's works among young people and intellectuals today. Despite whole historical strata separating Romanticism from counterculture, alternative consciousness widely uses the philosophical arsenal of the Romantics with its characteristic emphasis on the individual's self-sufficiency and the creative principle of life, with its faith in the purifying influence of nature on society's moral climate. However, it is not just a question of external resemblance—there are quite a few differences as well. The resemblance between Romanticism and counterculture is basically not in the details but in the fundamental mental attitudes.

The Romantic mentality of which the original artistic and philosophical elements took shape late in the 18th and early in the 19th centuries, has been the focus of close attention for many historians of culture. This interest for the ideological heritage of Romanticism is quite natural, for Romanticism did not sink in oblivion with the coming of the industrial era, of which it had distant forebodings—it continued to exist in certain altered forms, such as the philosophy of life (Nietzsche, Bergson, Spengler). ("Just as Romanticism, the 'philosophy of life' rejects the mechanistic intellectual worldview and gravitates to the organic one... The 'philosophy of life' formed the framework for the interest in the historical study of such 'living wholes' as religion art, language, etc., especially characteristic of the Jena school and Romantic philosophy with its theory of

hermeneutics," wrote the Soviet researcher Piama Gaidenko (29, 5, 349). More than that: Romanticism, mediated by the 'philosophy of life' and Existentialism, remains an important dominant of contemporary philosophical culture in the West.

Gradually, a deeper and more complex understanding is achieved on Romanticism as an integral socio-historical and spiritual process which goes far beyond the framework of a merely artistic vision of the world. Disjoint, if striking, elements of the Romantic mentality were put together, forming a "system" of worldview constructions, so that Romanticism could now be regarded as a philosophy—if a highly unusual philosophy, by the standards of previous tradition. It was unusual, first of all, in that the Romantics themselves were resolutely intent on destroying the system-positing nature of traditional metaphysics which killed in their view the spirit of productive intuition and the intimacy of creativity. Instead, it was proposed to construct a "symphophilosophy" which would implement the syncretism of world perception, the dynamism of nature, and the fusion of subject and object in the act of creation. According to the Romantics' overall scheme, the infinite dynamism of the organic world, which overcame the resistance of inert matter through struggle and cataclysms, was to be paralleled by just as infinite, creative and dynamic structure of the inner self, realised in artistic-philosophical works. Schelling described the ideal of the Romantic epoch as a wonderful time when the human spirit was unfettered, it believed it had the

right to oppose its real freedom to all that was, and to inquire not only about what was but also about that which was possible.

The principal attitudes of Romantic mentality were carried over to the USA by the Transcendentalists and realised in their literary and philosophical works, in their work of religious reformation and in social Utopias.

Reading the philosophers who belonged to the Romantic movement in the USA, Emerson and Thoreau in the first place, one is inclined to believe that many of the schemata of the philosophy of counterculture were invented long before its emergence in the second half of the 20th century. The question also arises: what were the ways of the transformation of Romanticism into its contemporary neo-Romantic version? What was acquired in the course of that evolution, and what was irretrievably lost?

To answer these questions, we shall select two themes out of the wealth of the philosophical heritage of Transcendentalists and, mainly, of Thoreau. These important themes—man and nature; man and society—are obviously close to the ideology of the Left radical consciousness today.

2. Henry Thoreau's Naturalism and Its Perception by Present-Day Romantics

The American Transcendentalists' attitude to nature is highly consonant with the spirit that dominated, and partly still dominates, the views of the Left radical intellectuals. This is true not only of the environmentalist

movement of the Greens, whose strength grows from year to year, but also of the programme of immersion in the natural environment and the search in it for an answer to the spiritual-moral problems of our times. This trend combines social Utopianism, religious quest, primitivism, and other aspects of counterculture. The trend towards escape into nature is closely interwoven with anti-urban and anti-industrial attitudes. This set of programmatic ideas was characteristic of Thoreau, too. Paul Goodman, a well-known ideologue of counterculture, advocated "ruralism" or migration to rural areas and life in the womb of nature, identifying several stages in the development of the transformation of present-day society into a rural one that was, in his view, inevitable. The "wave of ruralism", he writes, "was the amazing multiplication of hermits and monks who began to set up places in the depopulated areas for their meditations and services of mankind. There had always been individuals who felt that the mechanized urban areas were ugly and unhygienic and who therefore fled to the country, at first only for the summers... But it was not until the early '70s that humanists began to realize that society had indeed reverted to Byzantine or Late Imperial times, and who therefore withdrew to save their souls" (53, 8). That was one of the aspects of neo-Romantic naturalism, which developed the anti-urbanist motifs of Thoreau's philosophy. Another consists in the fact that a runaway, whether an individual or a whole commune, tried to find in nature a true friend and interlocutor, to find a different reality in the world

of untouched landscapes, one that would replace the lost values of human communication. In some cases the emphasis was on the purely aesthetic, tinged with cosmism, perception of natural phenomena, of the implacably rotating seasons; in others, nature was directly endowed with spirituality and subsequently deified in the spirit of the Vedic cults.

Philosophical spiritualisation of natural landscapes is not something accidental or insignificant in the worldview of the present-day neo-Romantics, for they largely follow the paths broken by Emerson and Thoreau. Highly remarkable in this respect is Henry Beston's book *The Outermost House* written on the basis of his experiences of solitary life in the 1920s in a house on Cape Cod.

Beston's book is, at first sight, entirely a work of the naturalist genre. But closer scrutiny of it reveals its philosophy—a code of moral and psychological orientations on how one can and should become part of the natural environment and read its hieroglyphic cryptograms revealing to man the source of moral renewal or rebirth. (Both of these concepts, which played a key role in Thoreau's philosophy, are widely used by the neo-Romantics). Beston wrote that if someone asked him how he had managed to overcome the rigours of winter in the wilderness, alone, he could answer that he had enjoyed life from first to last day. It was a great happiness for him to watch and study the unfolding of the mighty elements, and he was only grateful to Nature for that happiness. Beston was thrilled by the huge territory full of hidden wild life proceeding smoothly according to

ancient laws, free from man's intrusion. No one came there to kill, but rather to study and watch. The land, the ocean, and the sky, the triple alliance of that coast, acted to achieve their majestic and complex goals, not needing man as naturally as any planet moving along the set route around the Sun.

Direct references to Thoreau are rare in Beston's book, which is in fact an embodiment of neo-Romantic ecologism; but the conceptual affinity of the two Romantic naturalists is beyond doubt. The theme of inescapable loneliness, ever present in the Romanticists' mind, permeates the whole of Beston's book. Some people said that his isolation, his hermit's life, were nothing but a pose; rejecting these accusations, and openly declaring his love of nature, which he thought of as an antithesis to urban society, Beston pointed out that the life forces concealed in nature were a hundred times more powerful a source of moral inspiration than communication with the city and its inhabitants. Being in the thick of lavish natural life, day and night, and involved in the continuous round of the great vital force, Beston felt an influx of hidden energy. In his view, life was universal energy similar to electricity or gravitation. Its presence supported life itself. That force could instantly engulf the individual's life like the sea of fire a candle light.

Despite the close affinity of the philosophical basis of *Walden* and *The Outermost House* there are also essential differences between them, which must not be ignored. Beston's book is much less symbolic than

Walden, and at the same time it is more down-to-earth, bearing the stamp of disappointment, now concealed, now open. For Beston, the Romantic ideal of Mother Nature ceases to be a living force of the moral renewal of the inner Self. Still, both thinkers fully agree that, on the cosmic scale, scientific knowledge and progress of technology must necessarily be rejected. Instead of exploiting the lifeless world of nature with the aid of sophisticated machines and technology, man and mankind must find a modest ecological niche and live in it, immersed in contemplation of the harmony of nature.

The Romanticism of American Transcendentalists, and the neo-Romanticism of the philosophers of counterculture, created a sort of naturalism which combined the cult of savage nature with glorification of the solitude and loneliness of the individual rejected by the community. They saw man as a monad that could only find its place in the dynamic flow of the natural forces. An indication of this is the immense popularity in recent philosophical literature of concepts associated with nature—"wild", "wildness', "wilderness'. Thus Gary Snyder, poet, ecologist, and protagonist of counterculture, referred to the magic of culture as the source of his attraction to nature. Roderick Nash had this comment to make in this connection: "Wilderness satisfied these urges. As the unknown, the unplanned, the uncontrolled, it was a sanctuary for the mysterious" (79, 259). It is appropriate to recall here Thoreau's idea that pristine nature would be the salvation of the world. It is wild nature that con-

stantly animates the forces of intuition inherent in man yet constantly failing, although they are so much needed today, in these times of the dominance of intellect-bound and technocratic forms of social life.

Neo-Freudian motifs permeate the Romantic naturalism of Theodore Roszak, a major theoretician of counterculture. In his view, untouched nature was one of the few remaining phenomena of the world capable of arousing a worshipful attitude in modern man. In this sense, Roszak compares love for nature with one person's love for another (incidentally, this comparison frequently occurs in Thoreau). In the presence of someone you love, just as in a pristine natural environment, we have no desire to look for, calculate, sum up or solve anything. We are immersed in the delightful experience of the fascinating fact of the existence of these phenomena in their full self-sufficiency. We are lost in the splendour and awesome grandeur of the moment and wish nothing more. This combination of natural and social values reflects the general direction of the neo-Romantic search for the truth in the modern world. The question remains open, however (and that is a question that Thoreau also had to face): does the individual romantically contemplating nature act on his own behalf only, or does he have the whole of mankind behind him? A certain intimacy of direct relations between man and nature creates the illusion that in the womb of nature an escapist can find a remedy against loneliness and alienation. But is that really so? Having passed through all the stages of a Romantic

escape from the city into nature, Henry Thoreau came to the conclusion that, despite all its splendour, nature cannot be a full equivalent of social morality. The alternative movement of the neo-Romantic ecologists also follows this path.

3. Nature and the Social Alternative

American Transcendentalists and philosophers of counterculture closely studied the entire range of problems involved in the interaction between man and society, relying on two important propositions: moral rejection of the existing social relations and the assertion of the principle of self-reliance.

Modifying Emerson's general philosophical theses, Henry Thoreau tried to set up a system of moral values different from contemporary society's. Thoreau's basic negative orientation was very close to 20th-century Romantics. Without entering into a dialogue with the establishment, they aspire to go beyond the framework of the existing system of values, to create their own world of culture, one that has no contacts with traditional culture.

Fully in accord with the ideas of Thoreau, the neo-Romantics do not see the scandalous vices of contemporary society as sad errors due to the miscalculations of governments. They attribute the blind alleys and crises of 20th-century civilisation to the contradictions of the industrial system, which fundamentally changed the poles of the moral value scale:

man ceased to be the goal of historical development, becoming a means of attaining self-seeking goals basically alien to him.

Underlying Emerson's and Thoreau's critique of civilisation was the so-called moral argument. In their view, civilisation's principal crime against humanity was that it brought about a decline in morality, a degradation of the integrality of the individual, and his abnormal specialisation. The world chose the false path of accumulating technical and scientific knowledge that ultimately gave no moral satisfaction and left "the humiliated and the insulted" uncared-for. The unchecked chase after the attractive fruit of technological progress and material consumption inflicted heavy losses on spiritual culture and art, resulting in an erosion of their human content. Science and knowledge must be replaced by the experiencing of surrounding life.

This moralism, whether Thoreau's or the neo-Romantics', is fairly easy to criticise. The whole approach is obviously superficial and somewhat Utopian, it ignores the deep socioeconomic and political structures of the social organism. Despite all the weaknesses of moral Utopianism, though, it continues to exist, serving as the basis for various social movements, individual acts of peaceful protest, and sincere sacrifices in the name of common good, however unusually interpreted. In other words, the moral idealism of Thoreau and the neo-Romantics is by no means a trifling fad of philosophical consciousness but a stable form of alternative thought and action under the conditions of

domination of highly ramified bureaucratic institutions. It is this that makes Thoreau's moralism interesting to us, and not for purely historical reasons either. What Thoreau expressed so boldly and strikingly in *Walden*, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", and other essays, continued to exist as a programme of restoring the moral health of modern society through the construction, and partly renewal, of the principles of moral thinking that accord with the goals and perspectives of the whole mankind.

The moralism of Thoreau and neo-Romantics contains a philosophical nucleus—the theory of the individual's self-reliance. This concept, invented by Emerson, is couched in different terms, but its essence remains the same. In the broadest sense, self-reliance, as has been mentioned above, stresses the self-contained character of the individual that does not need anything or anyone to manifest his spiritual potential. The theory of self-reliance calls on you "to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men..." (26, 84). This in turn entails recognition of the individual's complete autonomy in relation to other individuals and to society as a whole. The individual's inexhaustible spiritual world becomes a safe refuge from the hostile influences and encroachments on personal freedom from the outside. Physically, it is very difficult to resist these encroachments, considering the strict controls in contemporary society; but moral self-reliance raises a barrier that external aggressive encroachments cannot overcome.

In the past, Thoreau and the Transcendentalists practically demonstrated some of the aspects of self-reliance, especially in the Walden experiment. Opposing himself to an unjust social system, a person could, Thoreau believed, leave such a society, he could break off all economic and spiritual links with it, leave for the woods and start a new life. That was, in the words of Sinclair Lewis, a "one-man revolution". The revolutionary principle itself is quite effective, but such a revolution does not require anything apart from personal courage, conscience and knowledge of the objectives. However, this programme for moral renewal, well within anyone's reach, concealed a major problem. An individual escape without a basis in a broader social orientation inevitably leads, sooner or later, into a blind alley. The freedom of individual spiritual development in constant communion with free nature ultimately leads to discontent; absence of true communication makes more apparent than ever the escapee's inner emptiness; and nature, so kind and aesthetically attractive at one time, becomes a hostile sphinx that brooks no partnerships. That is why self-reliance as a principle of 19th-century Transcendentalism and 20th-century neo-Romantic counterculture is an extremely unreliable instrument for solving the moral dilemmas of our times, although its simplicity, accessibility and convincingness makes it highly attractive.

Thoreau himself said on several occasions that repetition of his Walden experiment by other persons was a useless enterprise. Everyone who decides to find his true self must

design an experiment of his own, he must carry out an escape even if it will not take him beyond the drawing-room of his own house. A resolute act, a change in the style of life and everyday routine have the strength of a moral imperative, a categorical imperative of a kind, which cuts off the way of retreat or regress. In a word, the social act accompanying a person's escape ensures the purity and effectiveness of the experiment.

The neo-Romantic mentality has proposed a compromise affording a balance between the individualism of the self-reliance theory and the obvious need under present-day conditions to take into account the interests of other individuals and of society as a whole; that compromise is the idea of commune, of communal intercourse among those who, for some reason or other, has dropped out of society. The conflicts of the neo-Romantic search for the harmony of individual and society have a concrete prototype in the life and philosophy of Henry Thoreau. It was Thoreau who put forward the principle of civil disobedience which, many of its important aspects aside, comprised the idea of self-reliance, later transformed into a programme for the individual's abstinence from the alien social life.

The idea of collective abstinence became widespread in counterculture. Its origin is often associated with Thoreau's philosophy. In his introductory remarks in *The New York Times Magazine* on the position of abstinence, Paul Starr, instructor at the Yale Law School, outlines a set of social values accepted by the Left radical intellectuals today. He writes, in

particular, that young people nowadays are "practitioners of a kind of radical social abstinence... They remain outsiders, ideologically committed against working within capitalist institutions or just viscerally incapable of making the necessary compromises in speech, dress and attitude" (95, 100). The young people who choose the path of abstinence refuse on principle to follow their occupations, they continually change jobs, places of residence, life objectives. They may now work at a cooperative food shop, now at film studios, then participate in groups of radical therapy. In some cases they decide that a short spell of political activity can be meaningful.

The ideological foundations of abstinence laid by Henry Thoreau are by no means the fads of socially unbalanced radicals but a specific mode of consciousness that has currency and weight in society. At times, abstinence takes extreme forms, characteristic of modern industrial society with its acute conflicts.

In a series of articles (36), Jerome Glenn, an American political scientist and futurologist, gives an account of three experiments, different in their orientation but identical in their neo-Romantic mood. Three communes—Auroville, Arcosanti, and Findhorn—are constructed on the principles of Romantic communion, closeness to nature, and cultivation of integral religiosity. "Auroville really is a kind of evolutionary *deme*. This is the word geneticists use to describe small isolated populations that have a mutation in them. The species will always send out little tend-

rils from the major adaptation of where it is now, and these tendrils will explore new ecological niches and in these niches a mutation will occur. And as long as the mutation is in communication with the rest of the species then there's a feedback into the species as a whole and it will flow into the ecological breakthrough and will create the major adaptation for the future and then once again will fan out" (36, III, 43). All the communes described are units created by the will of one person obsessed by the idea of saving mankind from death and of founding the Kingdom of Truth on Earth. Although the theory and practice of such communities are a fairly drastic departure from the philosophy of Thoreau, they also bear features of the Romantic cult of the hero, the zealot, the guru inherent in Transcendentalism. Interestingly, these and similar communal experiments have their prototypes in the Transcendentalist Utopias of Brook Farm, Fruitland and even Walden.

In 1840, George Ripley organised, together with a group of his associates, the first commune at Brook Farm, whose purpose was to achieve spiritual brotherhood of men. Without going into a detailed discussion of the history of Brook Farm, it is important to note that that Transcendentalist experiment was based on the faith in the possibility of a communal way of life, as opposed to the "collectivism" of big business, and on fraternal relations between men. At present, this search for new forms of communication involves a complex interaction of spiritual and technological means of communication exchange. Designing a new language for communication

has become the catchword of the neo-Romantic wave.

Thus Ivan Illich a modern philosopher and "humanist radical", praises the language of silence as the most expressive instrument of interpersonal communication that is at the same time free from any vulgarity. Among other things, he writes this: "An objective study of the ways in which meanings are transmitted has shown that much more is related from one man to another through and in silence than in words... The grammar of silence is an art much more difficult to learn than the grammar of sounds... The man who shows to us that he knows the rhythm of our silence is much closer to us than one who thinks that he knows how to speak" (51, 41-42). The eloquence of silence declared by Ivan Illich stresses the nonverbal forms of communication, imparting a symbolic meaning to them.

Counterculture undoubtedly enriched the practice of nonverbal communication. Official social circles had to face the challenge from the adherence of the philosophy of abstinence, and this created a new type of relationship, which included new rituals, verbless contacts, and the logic of silence. The search for such contacts goes back to Thoreau and the American Transcendentalists who studied the verbless language of nature, of natural sounds. Thoreau wrote a great deal on the subject in *Walden* (see chapters "Sounds", "Higher Laws") and in his earlier work *Sound and Silence*. The idea of a transcendent melody that sets the rhythm of communication runs through the whole of Thoreau's work.

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The ascertainment of a philosophical tradition and continuity in the history of culture requires precise proofs. The affinity between Henry Thoreau's philosophical heritage and contemporary neo-Romanticism in its various guises cannot always rely on such proofs. In most cases it is merely a matter of certain similarity of moods, approaches and terms. But that is, in fact, quite a lot, for mental attitudes in the history of philosophy and culture have sometimes played a more decisive role than coincidence in rational constructs; they have often proved more stable than system-forming traditions. In his lifetime, Henry Thoreau gave a strikingly powerful impetus to the future development of the Romantic tradition in American culture, and for this reason, wherever and whenever neo-Romanticism might make itself felt, it is immediately linked with the heritage of the American Transcendentalists. Very often, this association facilitates a better understanding of modern times.

THOREAU IN A CHANGING WORLD

Nowadays, when Henry David Thoreau has been rightly recognised as one of the foremost representatives of American culture, and his book *Walden, or Life in the Woods* is everywhere acclaimed as a classic of world literature, the history of the slow and difficult growth of his fame appears especially paradoxical.

Almost entirely ignored by his compatriots as writer and philosopher, Thoreau became, during his lifetime already, a "character" around Concord; rumour mocked at the half-wit who despised the canons of American common sense, spending all his time in useless walks in the woods. He was forever branded as a free-thinker, which earned him the hatred of the Philistines. According to eyewitness accounts of the inhabitants of Concord, where Thoreau is buried, until quite recently an ancient crony used to come to the cemetery; placing flowers on the graves of Emerson and Hawthorn, she would turn to Thoreau's tombstone and, shaking her tiny fists, curse the "Godless" man (43, 141). Largely reflecting the attitude of Thoreau's former colleagues from the Transcendental Club, his name was for half a century asso-

ciated in the minds of Americans with the idea of a landscape writer of limited ability and purely regional significance. Truly it was said that no prophet is accepted in his own country; Thoreau's fame abroad—in England, Germany and Russia—far outstripped his recognition at home.

Highly interesting in this respect, and important for the history of philosophy, seems the fact that Thoreau's work was noticed by Leo Tolstoy. With his characteristic keenness of mind, Tolstoy constantly kept up with the latest achievements of Western culture. Early in the 1890s he read Thoreau's essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", and told his friend and publisher Vladimir Chertkov that a translation of that work into Russian was desirable (42, 64); the essay was duly translated.*

Tolstoy's interest in Thoreau's works deepened with time. Leo Tolstoy saw the American thinker as his ideological ally. This is also demonstrated by frequent references to Thoreau in Tolstoy's correspondence, and numerous quotations from his works included by Tolstoy in collections of great men's aphorisms, such as *The Circle of Reading*, *The Path of Life*, *Thoughts for Every Day*.

The affinity of the ideas of Tolstoy and

* The Russian translation was published in England, at Leo Tolstoy's expense. Only a small number of copies got into Russia, as the print-run was confiscated by the customs. For this reason, the work was not too well known in Russia. Before that, in 1887, part of *Walden* was translated into Russian and published in *Novoye vremya* under the title *V lesu* (In the Woods).

Thoreau is the subject of a separate and far-reaching study, so far not tackled by anyone. Here, we can only make a few general remarks on the subject. On becoming acquainted with Thoreau's ideas, Tolstoy undoubtedly paid the greatest attention to the theory of non-violent resistance, largely, if not fully, coinciding with his own doctrine rejecting violent resistance to evil. For this reason, Tolstoy especially marked out Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience". Thoreau's Romantic naturalism apparently left Tolstoy quite indifferent. Aylmer Maude, the English Tolstoyan who had several conversations with the Russian writer, thus expressed Tolstoy's assessment of Thoreau: "Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience* he selects as the best of all Thoreau's writings. Its great merit lies in its clear statement of man's right to repudiate, and refuse in any way to support, a Government which acts immorally... Thoreau was disinclined to devote himself to politics, but was also disinclined to support a Government of which he disapproved... *Civil Disobedience*... may yet prove to be the source from which a telling protest against war, or other evils enforced by Government, will spring" (quoted from: 10, 104).

Traditionally, researchers limit the affinity between Thoreau and Tolstoy exclusively to the idea of nonviolence. But the fact is that that idea followed from more general philosophical premises of the two thinkers. To what extent did these premises coincide? The problem has yet to be investigated, although a certain similarity of the views of Thoreau and Tolstoy on morality, religion

and science can be said to have been already established; true, this statement can only be made with reservations and qualifications. Thus Tolstoy's secretary, V. Bulgakov, noted in his diary: "In the evening, [Tolstoy] said that he had reread Thoreau's *Walden*, and that he had liked this book this time round no more than before. 'Affecting originality, challenging, restive," said Lev Nikolayevich about Thoreau" (17, 261). In the same year 1910, however, Tolstoy's publishing house *Posrednik* produced the most complete pre-revolutionary edition of that treatise.

At Tolstoy's Yasnaya Polyana estate, now a museum, visitors can see in his study the 1904 London edition of *Walden* among the books in Tolstoy's daily use. According to some accounts, Thoreau and his moral doctrine were the subject of constant discussions among the people close to Tolstoy. A secluded little building on the estate, the so-called apple orchard pavilion, which was used as a home hospital for the sick peasants to whom Tolstoy attended, was renamed Villa Thoreau, partly due to its resemblance to Thoreau's Walden cabin.

A study of Leo Tolstoy's attitude to Thoreau's philosophy contributes equally to a deeper understanding of the work of both thinkers. A great deal in this respect can be gained from the study of Tolstoy's archives and the well-preserved library of Yasnaya Polyana, in which many books in foreign languages have not yet been adequately described—and there are great numbers of books by 19th-century American philosophers and writers among them.

Thoreau's name is also associated with the social work of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1906 and 1907, when Gandhi led the struggle of Indian immigrants in South Africa for their civil rights, he heard for the first time of "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience". Recalling the American philosopher's essay, which he had read in prison, Gandhi said that Thoreau's ideas influenced him greatly. He actively assimilated some of them and recommended that all of his friends who assisted him in liberating India should study Thoreau. This was why, he recalled, he borrowed from Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" the name of the movement he headed. He could not find the proper word for the Indian "satyagraha" until he had read the essay. Thoreau's ideas, he acknowledged, had a great influence on the liberation movement in India (see 27).

Gandhi had a sound knowledge of Thoreau's works and, as leader of the campaign for nonviolent resitance to the British colonialists, used many propositions of Thoreau's political programme. Gandhism, the philosophical-political doctrine substantiated by Mahatma Gandhi, was in some of its aspects application of Thoreau's ideas to the tasks of anti-colonial national liberation movement (cf. 46, 147).

The turning-point in the fate of Thoreau's heritage in his country was the publication in 1906 of his complete works in 20 volumes. Thoreau appeared here before the reader in all the complexity of his many-sided literary-philosophical talent. Beginning with that moment, the overall number of editions of

his works in all the languages of the world grew sharply, and Thoreau was now spoken of not only as a great and original master of naturalist observations but also as a man whose worldview was not restricted in its significance to the history of New England only. In the years of the prewar depression interest in Thoreau became universal. Practically every major American writer believed it his duty to express his attitude to Thoreau's ideas. Charles Ives, the outstanding American composer, dedicated his famous "Concord Sonata" to him. Research into Thoreau's spiritual heritage started at US universities; his works were included in lists of required reading on the history of American literature, philosophy and politics. At present, a great deal of work in spreading information and partly in coordinating efforts is done by the Thoreau Society at the State University of New York, in Geneseo. One of the founders of the Society, its many-time president and permanent secretary is Professor Walter Harding, a major authority on the life and heritage of Thoreau. Professor Harding has collected a vast number of various documents and materials concerning Thoreau. The Society publishes a modestly looking but invariably interesting quarterly, *The Thoreau Society Bulletin*, offering exhaustive up-to-date information on the state of Thoreau studies in the USA and other countries.

Each year in June, a two-week seminar is organised in Concord, on Walter Harding's initiative and under his guidance, for young scholars studying the life and work of Thoreau. As a rule, the ending of the seminar

coincides with the beginning of all-American congresses of the Thoreau Society, which, according to tradition, are annually convened here in Concord, Thoreau's birthplace.

Collectors of biographical detail and rare books gravitate towards the Thoreau Lyceum—a mixture of literary museum, lecturing bureau, library, archives and bookshop. The Lyceum is a centre of regional studies of which the prototype are Thoreau's excursions into nature through Massachusetts and other states.

The Lyceum's board has tried repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, to do something in the way of a memorial in the house in Main Street where Thoreau lived in his later years and died. The Lyceum's oral annals show that its members went to extraordinary lengths in their attempts, sometimes reminiscent of adventures in thrillers, to examine the house. Its owners, though, fully enjoying their property rights, refuse to hear any talk of Thoreau. Without any local or federal aid, existing only on pittance dues and charity collections, the Thoreau Society and the Thoreau Lyceum face endless financial difficulties, always on the brink of closure.

Although Thoreau's fame in postwar America reached national proportions, not all the problems involved in the interpretation of his heritage in contemporary US social life have been resolved. In 1959, Walter Harding wrote: "There is still, however, one important qualification of his fame. He still lacks 'official' recognition. He has not been elected to the Hall of Fame. He has appeared on no postage stamps. His alma mater, Har-

vard University, has named no chairs or halls in his honour. There is no statue of Thoreau gracing any city park. He is still *persona non grata* in certain circles for his political, social and economic views" (43, 205).

A few changes have taken place since these lines were written. Thoreau's bust has at last appeared in the Hall of Fame; a stamp has been issued bearing the philosopher's portrait. But Thoreau remains a *persona non grata* in circles representing official US ideology. Generally speaking, that is not surprising, for Thoreau stood in a sense at the source of the tradition that is now termed counterculture, or alternative culture. Rejecting the idea of revolutionary transformation of society, representatives of counterculture reject, along with it, the whole set of spiritual and material values of that society. Unwilling to live in the old way, adherents of this trend do not believe it necessary, however, to change reality. Naturally, they feel the need for pure moralism and spiritualist naturalism. Thoreau's heritage is in this respect a rich source of inspiration for the critique of the establishment by representatives of counterculture.

At the end of the "turbulent 60s", the explosion of protest among the young people raised Thoreau's heritage to a new height. The ideologues of the youth movement, primarily the "New Left", turned to 19th-century American culture in their search for theoretical predecessors. Thoreau's personality, his books, his socio-philosophical and political tenets took a new lease of life; Thoreau was declared to be nothing short of a symbol

of radically minded US youth. That was why Harvis Curtis Webster was justified in writing in his preface to a new mass edition of Thoreau's works that his ideas "led the march to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965, and impelled thousands of students to demonstrate against our policy in Vietnam in April of the same year" (100, XV-XVI). American youth showed particular interest for Thoreau's doctrine during the war in Vietnam. The authors of the study *USA: Students and Politics* write that Thoreau made a great impact on the formation of the antiwar opposition, and that "his views... as well as the methods of struggle he proposed, are popular in these days, too, especially among students" (see 97, 151). Early in the 1970s, many professional and student companies staged, with great success, the play *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* by Gerome Lawrence and Robert Lee. In the play, the authors widely used passages from Thoreau. The play's impact was all the greater since it appeared during the national movement for ending the war in Vietnam (see 60).

However, other circles which shaped public opinion also joined the campaign of glorifying Thoreau. In various treatments of his literary and philosophical heritage, emphasis was more and more placed on secondary aspects of his views irrelevant to the concrete and highly acute political situation. Rather quickly, Thoreau became a fashionable author. Thoreau's aphorisms appeared on buses. Quotations from Thoreau could be found on calendars produced by savings banks. His name was mentioned on all sorts of occasions.

Environmentalists, tourists and amateur ornithologists saw him as their prophet. Vegetarians and outdoor cranks regarded him as their spiritual kin. The wave of praise also animated Thoreau's critics. They presented the philosopher as an eccentric who was bent on setting himself apart from society and therefore reduced the debate to absurd statements, a man who proposed pseudo-original solutions for theoretical and practical problems.

For many Americans, Thoreau's name symbolises the principle of nonresistance to the violence perpetrated by the state machine. In their view, Thoreau was the first of a series of thinkers, such as Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, who implemented this principle in theory and practice. Of considerable interest is in this respect a statement by Ralph Abernathy, a well-known US public figure who fights on in Martin Luther King's cause: "We believe that if at all possible violence should not be resorted to. From our standpoint nonviolent methods of struggle are the only path for an oppressed people to fight for their rights in such a militarist country as the US. The black people have no guns, no weapons, no bombs that are necessary for a violent revolution... We can understand why people may choose defensive violent actions or even offensive violent actions. But our organisation's strategy is quite different. It consists in resisting evil by using what we believe to be the most effective force there is, namely, through nonviolent actions... We want to make America fulfil the promise given us—ensuring

justice and equal rights for the whole of the nation" (4, 61).

Personal example as the basis of transformation of society became the cornerstone of Thoreau's conception of revolution. He called on US citizens to violate unjust laws by all means available to them. If a hundred, or a dozen persons, or even one individual were to begin acting in this manner, in a critical situation that would set an example for general imitation, and the state would be destroyed. A certain part of contemporary American intellectuals share this view. Thus, Professor Charles Reich writes in his book *The Greening of America*: "In contrast to the efforts of radicals to attack and remake structure, up to now an almost total failure, stands the success of those who have simply changed their lives" (quoted from: 104, 125). It is hard to say whether this statement is Utopian or just socially naive. As for Thoreau himself, he was extremely interested in the political life of his country, and took very much to heart the victories and defeats of the democratic movement in the USA. Samuel Sillen writes: "Thoreau loved his country deeply enough to be outspoken about the defects that threatened its democratic promise. The polemical Thoreau is also the prophetic Thoreau. He summons us to resist the assault on reason and conscience which demagogically presents itself today as Americanism. He reminds us that the right to dissent is the cornerstone of our liberties. Does anybody imagine that the Thoreau who opposed the Mexican War and defended John Brown would pass the loyalty tests of Brow-

nell and McCarthy?" (93, 163).

Thoreau's worldview emerged and took shape in the years when the first social consequences of the industrial revolution became manifest in the USA; his system of view was therefore both an attempt to explain these consequences and an attempt to substantiate a constructive programme of action. The Left radical movement developed in the Western countries under the conditions of the scientific and technological revolution. Young radicals of the 1970s protested against inhuman use of the results of scientific and technological progress. The historical parallel between the industrial revolution of the 19th century in the USA and the current scientific and technological revolution, the similarity of the various social consequences of these two socio-economic phenomena can explain, perhaps, why some Americans found in Thoreau answers to certain political and ethical questions that were important to them.

In these days, when Left-wing radicalism in the USA is on the wane, Thoreau still has his ardent followers. Their numbers are not decreasing at all, only those who were previously attracted by the rebellious spirit of his denunciation of the ugliness of life now present him as an apostle of "natural life" in the lap of pristine nature, preaching the individual's dropping out of the all-embracing system of the establishment. That simply means that every epoch creates its own image of Thoreau. But that image offers a better insight into the epoch itself than into Thoreau.

"I learned this, at least, by my experiment,"

writes Thoreau, "that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours" (100, 240). Henry David Thoreau moved boldly towards his dream, although it was at times enveloped in a haze of Romantic illusions. Despite all the harsh conflicts of his spiritual evolution, Thoreau's path was marked by a selfless search for the truth, a love for the simple people of America, and a faith in the coming happiness of the people. And that made the life of the American philosopher and writer a decided antithesis to Philistine routine and complacency.

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NAME INDEX

A

Abaelardi, Petri,—18,19
Abernathy, Ralf—227
Aesohylus—80
Alcott, Amos Branson—38, 39, 53
Anacreon—80
Aristotle—80
Asmus, V.—17
Augustinus—18
Aurelius, Marcus—36
Averintsev, S.S.—88

B

Baudelaire, Charles—144
Bergson, Henri—201
Beston, Henry—205, 207
Bradford, William—10
Brown, John—54, 75, 182, 192-95
Brownson, Orestes A.—33

C

Calvin, Jean —29
Canby, Henry—53
Carlyle, Thomas—59, 70, 72-74, 179
Channing, William E.—53
Channing, Walter E.—66
Channing, William—38
Chesterfield—79
Coleridge, Samuel—59, 70-73, 79, 117
Columbus, Christopher—7
Confucius—78
Cousin, Victor—59

D

Descartes, René—59
Dickens, Robert—75, 174

E

Emerson, Ralph Waldo—11, 31, 37-40, 50, 53, 57, 60-62, 79, 95, 96, 120, 121, 130-35, 137, 191, 192, 205, 209, 211, 218
Empedocle—102
Engels, Frederick—53, 121
Etzler, J.A.—42

F

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb—59
Fuller, Margaret—38
Fourier, Charles—42

G

Gandhi, Mahatma—222, 227
Garrison, William L. — 53
Glenn, Jerome—214
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang — 34, 58, 79, 120, 134, 144
Goodman, Paul—204
Greeley, Horace—42, 51
Gruber, Christian—74
Guidenko, P.P.—202

H

Hamilton, Alexander—177
Harding, Walter—75, 78, 223
Hawthorne, Nathaniel—40, 218
Hegel, G.W.F.—100
Herreshoff, David—157
Homer—81
Horatius—80
Humboldt, Alexander von—146-48

I

Illich, Ivan D.—216
Ives, Charles—223

J

Jackson, Andrew—49
Jamblichus—80
Jefferson, Thomas—48, 161

K

Kant, Immanuel—59, 61, 79
King, Martin L.—227
Krutch, J.W.—33
Kurtz, Paul—32
Kwiat, Joseph J.—74, 75

L

La Rochefoucauld, François—79
Leif Erikson—7
Lenin, V.I.—97
Lewis, Sinclair—212
Locke, John—32, 45, 75, 60, 61, 74, 75
Losev, A.F.—18, 86-89
Lynd, Staugthon—157

M

Marx, Karl—34, 97, 156, 157
Mialo, K.G.—200
Morand, M.—156
Mong Dsi—78

N

Nash, Roderick—207
Nietzsche, Friedrich W.—201
Novalis—93, 117

O

Ovid—80
Owen, Robert—33

P

Parker, Theodore—38, 171
Parrington, Vernon L.—30, 189
Peabody, Elizabeth—38
Phillips, Wendell—53
Pindar—80
Plato—21, 64, 142
Pliny the Elder—80
Plotinus—131
Plutarch—80
Pochmann, H.A.—79
Porphyry—80
Pythagoras of Samos—18

R

Reid, Thomas—75
Ripley, George—43, 215
Roszak, Theodore—208
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques—20, 79, 161, 166, 167

S

Schelling, Friedrich W.J.—59, 70, 79, 94, 95, 100, 117, 129, 130, 142, 202
Schiller, Friedrich von—58, 162, 163
Schweitzer, Albert—227

Shaftesbury, Anthony—120
Sillen, Samuel—228
Snyder, Gary—207
Socrates—17, 18
Spengler, Oswald—201
Staël, Madame de—59
Starr, Paul—213
Stewart, Dugald—32, 74, 75
Sukhomlinsky, V.A.—149, 150

T

Theophraste—80
Todd, Edgeley—74
Tolstoy, Leo—219-21, 227
Tseng Tzu—78

V

Vergilius—80

W

Webster, Harvey Curtis—226
Whitman, Walt—55
Wordsworth, William—70

Z

Zeno the Stoic—24, 25
Zimmermann, Joann R. von—79

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